

“The Treasure of Christ & His Kingdom”

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” – thus sayeth the Lord. This truth is borne out in our lives. It’s a First Commandment issue – showing what we truly “fear, love and trust” – by how we spend our time, our money, our energy. The truth is that we worship the things of the Creation, and not the Creator. We do not always treasure Christ and His kingdom.

Christ Himself exhorts us: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Our Lord is calling for a change in our lives – a reorientation – a different worldview. He is calling us to repentance – to stop treasuring the things of this Creation. He’s forming in us the discipline of the new life which He gives to us – in which we live in His kingdom, rejoicing in His true and lasting treasures.

The world in which we live preaches its own sermon. It tempts our sinful nature by dangling its shiny treasures before our eyes – and we’re hooked. Houses, cars, phones, clothes – top shelf bourbon, premium cigars, gourmet coffee – a bulging 401K and great returns on investments – playtime for young & old alike, with the latest & greatest toys.

But moths chew up our clothes – termites erode our homes – rust turns our cars to dust – thieves break in and steal – and our treasures are destroyed. They simply do not last.

And just as we worship the things of Creation rather than the Creator – so we are also fixated on our glory, rather than the One who is truly glorious. Honor and a good reputation are certainly fine things – but when the spotlight shines on us, our sinful hearts are tempted towards evil.

Our interactions with others become self-centered. We use our words to put others down so that we are elevated in their eyes. We desire others to look up to us – as though we are of much more value. We want their lives oriented around our desires – leaving them with envy, jealousy, and covetousness rather than contentment.

In all this the focus is on us, what our sinful heart desires – our treasures, our glory – rather than the true glories of Christ and His kingdom. Our heart worship the false idols of the “treasures on earth” – and they always fall short, disappoint, and pass away. And our hearts are pierced, crushed, destroyed.

The truth is that you too shall pass away, just like all these “treasures on earth.” All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – the wages of sin is death – “remember that dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

But God treasures you – the heavens and the earth and everything in them shall pass away – but “my Word endures forever,” He says. He promises that all who repent and believe shall be saved – that where He forgives sin, He also gives life and salvation. Which means, you who believe in Him shall endure forever.

In our text this evening from St. Matthew’s Gospel – Jesus is teaching us about life in His kingdom. Just as the Season of Lent leads us to Holy Week (to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) – so Jesus is teaching us to take up our cross and follow Him. To live with Him in His kingdom, our sinful nature must be put to death, crucified with Christ – so that a new man may arise to live in righteousness and purity forever.

This is the baptismal life – the life of all who are united to Christ by faith – a life of repentance and faith. Like Jesus, you are called to deny yourself – to humble yourself – to say NO to your selfish, sinful, self-rule – and to “fear, love and trust” in Christ above all things.

As you examined yourself this evening in light of the Ten Commandments – it became clear that God’s will for your life has not been your will. With hearts laid bare, realizing that we are dust – we realize that in and of ourselves we have no hope.

But the ashes that remind us that we and our “treasures on earth” do not last – are traced upon our foreheads in the sign of the cross – reminding us that, in Christ crucified, there IS hope for sinners. Christ crucified for sinners is the true and eternal treasure.

That is where the hearts of believers are found – in Christ, following Him – living the daily discipline of contrition, repentance, and faith.

To live in His kingdom is to live in “righteousness and purity forever” – and so it seems odd that Jesus would warn us of “practicing righteousness” here in our text. But the warning pertains to doing this “before other people in order to be seen by them.” He warns us about doing such things for selfish reasons.

That is not what life in His kingdom is like. We don’t live as if the world revolves around us – it is centered in Christ and Him crucified. Yet we are lured away by other “treasures” – and forget the treasure of Christ and His gifts and living according to His will and His ways.

Giving to the needy is not about receiving the praise of men, it’s about serving the neighbor – which you know quite well, for Christ has provided for all of your needs of body and soul, your temporal and eternal needs.

Your prayer is “thy will be done” – not, “my will be done.” Your prayers are not to elevate you in eyes of men – it is to elevate your needs, and the needs of others, into the ears of our heavenly Father – begging His mercy, and knowing He is indeed merciful – for in Christ Jesus He has had mercy on you.

Fasting is not to impress others with your piety (or to simply lose weight so you look good) – it is a denial of the true needs that your body has – so that you might hunger and thirst for the greater needs, the needs of your soul, the needs which are both temporal and eternal. Fasting is a great discipline, and a great way to confess that the things of this earth are temporary – but the things of Christ shall never pass away.

Dearly beloved, God has treasured you in Christ Jesus – who denied Himself and took up His cross – for you and your salvation. He calls you to follow Him – giving you His crucified and risen Body and Blood – so that even while denying yourself, all your needs are provided for through His forgiveness, life and salvation.

His Body and Blood strengthens you for the journey of this life – living by every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – living, cherishing, treasuring all His gifts – because you are united to Christ by faith, and live with Him in His kingdom – now, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.