

In the Name of the Living God: Creator Father, Redeemer Son, Sustainer Spirit. Amen.

It has been off television for a while now, but I occasionally find myself wistfully longing for the award-winning series, *Downton Abbey*. A multi-season epic about a British aristocratic family and their servants spanning from around 1914 to the mid-1920s, before the global Great Depression. I was struck, in part, by the apparent simplicity of life at that time and place: no internet, no cell phone, no social media. The greatest technological and cultural shocks were the introduction of the house telephone and the radio.

What a contrast to my own life. It is full of cell phones beeping at me, browsing the internet, and more books than I can read in my lifetime. The characters in that series were able to focus their time and efforts on pursuits that addressed relationships and their vocations. This simplicity was extremely appealing to me and reminded me of the beginning of the Luke text for this Sunday: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

We live in a world where there are so many things clamoring for our attention that it is easy to lose our focus. In this text from Luke, Jesus is calling us to prioritize activities that give eternal life. Such a call to center (or re-center) our lives on God, might seem extremely difficult in our world, but is essential for our lives as Christians. If we do not, as Jesus goes on to suggest, we will be caught unprepared.

Whatever you want to say about Jesus, his story is presented of him being a gifted speaker. Think about it. If you wanted to get a group’s attention real quick and to hold onto it, you shock them with the headline. Isn’t that what the supermarket tabloids do? “I’m giving birth to Elvis’ baby on the planet Mars!” Story on page 6. Well, maybe not THAT nuts. But with his opening words, Jesus hits everyone where it gets noticed, and noticed in a hurry....all about money. YOUR money. Not the guy down the block. Do not be afraid and store up treasures in heaven, rather than on earth.

Is it time to panic? Are we called to drop everything, sell everything, and wear burlap and eat locusts like John the Baptist did? No. Luke is not suggesting an ascetic lifestyle, but rather a strategic appropriation of one’s possessions.

It is really a means of self discipline into moderation and preparation. Similar to Advent, this message is concerned with preparation and our role in spreading the good news.

“Spreading the Good News”. What IS that? What does that really mean? Really, we use or rather hear these phrases used, in good old “churchese”, the particular lingo or vernacular of our

tradition....and like you, I imagine myself getting that blank stare coming over my face when I hear certain code phrases. If that happens to us, imagine what it does to people who do not connect with church at all. Talk about a turn off.

The good news is that God produces and delivers energy that, unlike the world, is gospel centered. This text is all about vocation, not justification.

They do NOT point to a simple quid pro quo of “if you do this, then that will happen”....it is NOT “if you are prepared, then you will be saved”. Instead, the idea here is to be ready so that when God calls you to action, you seize the opportunity. Being prepared for God’s energy in the gospel. Being alert and being ready are like potential energy, ready to be turned into kinetic energy when prompted. The energy produced here is gospel centered....healing, justice, love, grace, peace.

Even more revolutionary to our worldly way of thinking, those who are ready for the return of the master will be served by God. This theme contradicts our usual notion that we serve God. Instead, God will serve us. That is almost inconceivable to us in our broken, isolated state but, again, this is not a works-righteousness system. Rather, it is more of a promise of what will happen when one has begun to re-center life around God. What is churchspeak, being called “good news”, is that God, through the life and example of Jesus as the Christ, will serve us in our life so that we will not be afraid.

Who wants to hear about Advent in Pentecost? Almost no one, but the focus on vocation is the center of Pentecost. And it might not only apply to individuals, but to churches as well. Are we, as individuals and as a church, ready to help others in need? Have we considered the issues of peace and justice that our society is wrestling with so that we can be a part of God’s solution?

Outside of these readings but deeply inside their message, is the great voice of the Creator reminding us how much we are loved, not for what we have, but for who we are. We do not have treasure. We are treasures. Servants who are blessed by the Holy One. Our economic standing, our homes and wealth are of no account to God. What matters is our lives. How we live, how we approach justice, care for the poor among us, and how we treat one another is the bottom line for judgment. Our success in worldly things will mean nothing.

Summer is a good time to take another look at all that we possess and inventory in our hearts and minds the spiritual treasures we have, the friends who love us without condition, the church that keeps us in communion with each other and God, the beauty of the material world that belongs to every human being. It is a good time to look up at the stars in awe, and remember that the God who made us also made them, but they are nothing compared with the treasure we have of being loved by that same God who asks us to show that love and care to every person we meet.

It is a good time...in the summer...to kick back. Reflect upon the love that we know through friends and family, all that comes from the goodness of God, and then “pay it forward”....giving that love and concern back to God as directed toward the others who we come in contact with.

All as we give thanks to God in this seasonal time of recreation and refreshment, in the name of the One and Holy God...made known to us as the Father, and as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

Amen.