

*“Where Your Heart Is” / Luke 12:22-34 / 19 October 2014*

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life. Do not worry, little flock. You're worth more than many birds. Only invest yourselves in things that matter. Only invest your time, and your energy, your resources, your treasure in the things of life, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Do not worry.” Isn't it interesting that for Jesus of Nazareth, the more generous we are, the less worried we'll be? This urgent philosophy of living turns everything-we-think-we-know on its head. For in the strange worldview of the Galilean, safety and happiness do not come from amassing a bunch of stuff, but rather investing all we are and all we have—the money, and the clothes, and the cars, and the homes—into the people and the causes we most truly love. For your worldly treasures will always follow your heart. “Do not worry, little flock.” And yet, Jesus, as always, does raise an interesting question: Where is your heart?

Well, let's think about that. If your house were on fire, and you escaped with your life, but you had just five minutes (and the foolish urge) to run back inside and pull one thing from the flames, what would it be? What would it be? All your legal documents, your living wills, and birth certificates, and passports—they can be replaced. Besides, I know most of you folks, and I'm quite certain that you've got those papers safely stashed in a fireproof box. No, you'd be an unusual person if you ran back inside a burning building just to fetch a piece of paper that proves you exist—risking your life to prove you're alive. What would it be? And please don't say your Keurig coffee maker; that's probably what started the fire in the first place. What's your pleasure, what's your treasure? During my Africa years, I kept journals, in part because I had no TV and no computer and no one to talk to in the evenings. I'd sure hate to lose those journals. I keep them in a trunk in the attic, up there where the bats make their summer home. (Our attic is the Chautauqua of the bats.) But in a decade and a half, I've never once opened one of those journals to read it. I don't really even care what they say anymore. Hundreds of handwritten pages filled with navel-gazing. Let them burn. My heart's not in them, just my past.

I think it's safe to say that you wouldn't rush back into the flames to grab your iPhone, no matter how many songs, and selfies, and games you have downloaded onto it. You'll let your computer melt into a toxic stew, despite the fact that an observer from another planet might believe that you're married to it, for all the time you spend with it. All the silk, and wool, and cashmere in your closet will dissolve alongside the polyester. No one's going to rescue those things, even if you did get them at Saks Fifth Avenue. They'll burn alongside the clothes you bought on sale at Sears. You'll miss the art and some of the more interesting pieces of furniture. There are vases, and prints, and sculptures that you'll never find anyplace else in all the world, and they'll be gone forever. Let them burn, let them burn. Your heart's not in any of those things.

Well, the flames are rising, my friend. You'd better make your decision fast, only three minutes left. If I were sure I had a whole five minutes, I'd surely go back inside to make sure the pets got out. I mean, I really dislike my kids' dog. It's a quivering little yippee dog—more of a barking squirrel than dog, really. I don't like the dog, but I couldn't stand the thought of it suffering. No, if you went back in at all, which you would probably not, if you went back in, it would be for something that's not solely about you. You might risk your life to rush back into the house and snatch up a few old black and white photos of people you love, or loved. They're not valuable, but the people they depict are. If you're a parent, just might, hurry into the house to grab a few mementos of the days when your kids were young: a stuffed giraffe, a tiny shoe, a finger-painting, decades old, done with love by little hands. Your heart is not in those things, exactly, but it's in the people they recall. And if you do run back in for a teapot, or a silver platter, or a pair of salt and pepper shakers shaped like chickens, it will not be for the objects themselves, but for the people that those objects represent to you. The family Bible, paper letters written by hand and yellowed with age, a doll, a ring—all symbols of your life's best people.

The stuff that's mostly just about you, the high school yearbooks, the old prize ribbons, and trophies, and diplomas, the titles and deeds—these things you'll abandon to the inferno. Let them burn,

let them burn. The boxes of unused checks, the medications, the food in the cupboard—it's all expendable. The things that you would risk yourself to fetch are the things that make you feel closer to those you love, or loved. Your heart's not in the things; it's in the people they represent. It's in the times that you shared. It's in the ways they caused you to feel more fully you, more fully alive, more fully a part of something bigger and better than just one person alone can ever be. And honestly, if I couldn't safely guarantee you five full minutes to go back into the house, even these things you would allow to burn. It would hurt, but deep down, each of us knows the wisdom of Jesus statement, "Life is more...more than food, more than mementos, more than documents, and the body is more than clothing." No, if it came right down to it, we would allow all things to pass from our own hands in order to save our lives. And the few things we might go in to rescue, they're not the things that speak to us of ourselves, but the things that speak of our connectedness to others. Where is your heart? Where is your treasure? It's with the people who've given your life meaning. It's with the groups that have formed your identity. It's with causes that no fire can burn. Your truest treasures are the things that cannot rust, or be eaten by moths, or reduced to smoldering ash. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be."

When we read these wise words of Jesus in the Book of Matthew, we call them the "Sermon on the Mount." But when we read them in Luke, as we did today, they're called the "Sermon on the Plain." I typically prefer mountains to plains, but geography aside, I must say that I like Luke's retelling better. For Luke, that long ago sermon of Jesus has a little different configuration from the one in Matthew. It begins with the advice, "Do not worry," and it all comes together with the sage observation at the end, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And so, where is your heart's great treasure? It's not in your bank account, as much as you might worry about your balance. It's not in your IRAs or your investment portfolios. It's not hiding beneath your mattress or in the coffee can on the highest shelf in the garage. (You thought I didn't know about that hiding place, huh?) No, if your heart is in any of those, then it's terribly misplaced. Money's a nice tool, but a poor master, a poor spouse, a poor reason for living. No, your money, like your time, like your energies, like your stray thoughts and dreams, will always follow after your heart. And so, the question is not, "Where's your treasure?" for that will be obvious. The question is, "Where's your heart?"

If we think about the question, we know the answer...or answers. The problem is that our hearts get lost. They lose their way and end up wandering lonely in places where they never belonged, places where they cannot stand to be. "Home is where the heart is." And yet, our hearts do get broken and misplaced; they stray far from their homes. Our hearts get lost like a Clevelander trying to find Heinz Field. Is it any wonder that our lives are filled with worry when our hearts get lured away from home by all the fool's gold and false treasures of the world? They foolishly chase after the empty dreams of wealth and physical beauty, security and influence, power, money, the admiration of others. Our hearts even get caught in the sticky webs of unhealthy relationships, addictions, self-destruction. I bet you could tell me, if you thought about it, you could tell me just exactly where and when your own heart lost its way, perhaps long ago. Our foolish hearts get cheated into believing that life is about all the many treasures we can attain. But our hearts will not be in those treasures, and they will never truly make us happy, no matter how big the pile. And isn't it shocking how we end up neglecting our life's true treasures while running after the false ones that always remain one step beyond our grasp? The people who grow up or grow old while we're not looking, the causes that we care about but end up neglecting, the acts of real beauty, the kindnesses that we never get around to because we were so busy panning for the fool's gold of the world! You can save up a beautiful retirement for yourself, but if in order to do that, you've neglected your life's best people and causes, then your heart has been led astray. Better to be poor and loved than rich and lonely. Where's your heart? If your life's energies, and time, and resources are mostly invested into making you feel successful, and safe, and secure in the world, then your heart has lost its way. The weekly prayer asks for nothing more than daily bread. All your store of worldly treasure is meant to be invested in the things and the people you believe in. "Home is

where the heart is.”

Speaking of getting lost, there were two hunters who got lost in the woods. (I think they were my wife's uncles.) The more they wandered around, looking for the path, the more lost they seemed to become. Nothing looked familiar, and it was getting dark. The older one finally said, “Okay, I remember from my hunter's safety course that if you get lost, you're supposed to stay in one place and shoot into the sky three times. It's hunter code for, 'I'm lost.' And some other hunter will come to rescue you.” So the two men stopped and shot into the sky three times. Half an hour passed, nothing. They tried again, still nothing. At last the younger guy said to the older, “Okay, let's try again, but it better work this time because we're almost out of arrows.” Yes, our hearts get lost. And they are never at ease when we ask them to live in places where they don't belong. A lost heart is a source of constant stress, and that's why Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain” begins with the words, “Do not worry” and ends by talking about where our hearts are.

I don't mean to sound sappy or sentimental, but our hearts just know when they're at home. They just know. Have you ever met a stranger and felt instantly at home with him or her? They don't judge you; they're accepting, easy to talk to. They listen and share without all the guardedness. Some people just feel like home. Have you ever walked into a strange place, a house, or a coffee shop, or a church, and instantly known that this place was somehow meant for you? There's a safety, a comfort, a freedom in some places, a kind of emotional warmth that whispers, “This is home. I belong here.” I've always liked the Easter story in the Gospel of Luke, the one about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, because they walked miles and miles with Jesus, not knowing exactly who he was. But then, when they look back on the encounter, they ask each other, “Did our hearts not burn within us? Did our hearts not burn within us when we were in his presence, taking him for a stranger? Didn't we sense somehow that we were most truly at home with him?” Where does your heart burn within you? Where and with whom are you most truly at home? Are you investing your time, and your energies, and your resources there and with that one? Where's your heart? Where's your treasure?

Most of us have three or four places that are a regular part of our day-to-day lives. We've got the literal homes where we are most freely ourselves, where we invest so much of what we are, and where we spend far less time than we'd like, or perhaps far more. We've got our workplaces, and even if we're retired, we return to them in our dreams at night. And we've got those third locations. For some it's a club. For others it's a bar, or a lake house, or a condo down south. For many—perhaps most—of us, that third location is our church. It's not that we're religious nuts; it's not that we don't ever have our doubts; it's just that this place, too, is somehow home. No matter how many years we may have spent away, no matter whether we're newcomers, or oldcomers, or rarecomers, it's home. A member of this church stopped attending for some years. When she finally returned, she told me, she expected people to ask her, “Where have you been?” But instead they said to her, “We've missed you.” That's home! Our hearts may wander, but home is where they always take you back. I hope that we are creating just such a home for all people—and for every kind of person—here at Bower Hill Church.

Are you investing your time and resources into the things of home—the people and the causes that you love? Or is your heart wandering after the false treasures? Ask yourself, too, whether this place is home to you. Does your heart sometimes burn within you here? Have these people and this place made you more than you would have been without them? Is this a place of safety and belonging for you and yours? Are you putting your treasure here? Your resources will follow your heart. The church is entirely dependent on your annual pledge and your gifts. But before you fill out the pledge card, ask yourself, “Where's my heart? Where's my home? Is it here?” Amen.