

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
HIDDEN TREASURE
LUKE 12:32-48
August 8, 2010
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Jesus' teachings about money and treasure involve impractical instructions. He assures his followers that it is God's desire to give them the kingdom. But then he tells them to sell everything, to give alms, and to invest solely in heavenly treasure. But the point, however, is plainly true. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also!

This lengthy passage has both teachings of Jesus about treasure and a parable from Jesus concerning the promises of God. Those who are wide awake to God's coming will find their true needs being served.

God comes to us at times and in ways we least expect. This is part of God's surprising graciousness. Shouldn't we also offer gracious service to the needy people we encounter day by day?

The teachings of Jesus were often confusing. Sometimes even his closest followers were a long time understanding some of the things he said. For example, on one occasion he said to his disciples, "***Do not be afraid, because it is God's pleasure to give you the kingdom.***" "What kingdom?" they must have wondered. Then he said, "***Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.***" But how could they be sure of treasure they could not see?

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Scotland in 1850. He was a frail and sickly child and was tubercular throughout the forty-four years of his life. Nevertheless, he lived an adventurous life and traveled widely. He became a prolific writer, and in 1883 he wrote the book that brought him both fame and fortune. Its title is ***Treasure Island***. It became a cherished story to multitudes of

imaginative readers looking for adventure. A boy, Jim Hawkins, learns of the whereabouts of a buried treasure from an old sailor staying at his mother's inn. Jim shows the treasure map to two men, who help him put together the expedition that takes them to Treasure Island. Among the ship's crew are Long John Silver and his band of followers, who are secretly after the treasure too. The story includes an attempted mutiny, a bloody battle, and the eventual discovery of the treasure with the help of a marooned sailor named Ben Gunn. Stevenson's writing produced a substantial and impressive body of work, but *Treasure Island* is the book by which he is best known.

Young and old alike find rumors of lost treasure exciting, whether it is buried treasure, sunken treasure, or stolen treasure. All of us are treasure hunters of one kind or another, and what people treasure is something very interesting. It is said that one person's "**trash**" may be another person's "**treasure.**" Our treasure may be something we already have or something we desire. If you had to give away everything you own, what would you give away last? If you could have anything you want, what would you choose? The way we answer such questions reveals a great deal about us.

The idea of treasure has such a hold on our imaginations that it is almost impossible for us to believe it could have a downside. People's treasures often turn out to be problematic, however. First, we may become so passionate about our treasure that it consumes us, especially if it is something we want but do not have. We may become so obsessive about this treasure that we greatly exaggerate its importance and lose sight of the value of other things. Second, our treasure may distract us, causing us to neglect our families or to ignore practical responsibilities of real importance. Third, our treasure may disappoint us. Nothing is as good as it looks at a distance, or when it belongs to someone else. Our desire for something can set us up for serious disappointment or disillusionment. Perhaps your treasure is not a thing, but a dream or a fantasy or great ambition. Perhaps your treasure is a self-image or an ideology or another person.

Theologian Paul Tillich developed the concept of "**ultimate concern.**" Every person has an ultimate concern, something that concerns them in an ultimate sense. What matters most to you? What is your ultimate concern? Tillich believed that God is the proper ultimate concern, and for him God and Ultimate Concern are almost synonyms. But, he said, a person's God is whatever is that person's ultimate concern.

Jesus spoke to his disciples about what they should care most about. Their ultimate concern should be the kingdom of God. The problem was that most of Jesus' followers, including his twelve disciples, believed that he was going to establish a political and military kingdom there in Israel. They envisioned a Messiah who would re-establish the golden age of Israel, who would organize armies, and who would drive the Roman occupation force out of Palestine altogether. When Jesus said, ***"Sell what you have, because you have treasure in heaven,"*** his disciples must have wondered if they heard him correctly. These were relatively poor people. They were to sell or give away what little they had? Why? Because they had treasure in heaven? We should be sympathetic. Who would give up the visible, tangible things they owned for treasure that was completely hidden from them?

It is ironic, but losing the treasure we've always wanted may be necessary if we are to find the hidden treasure we truly need. The disciples' world would come to an end. They lost both the only world they knew and the world they were hoping for. Their master, Jesus, would be arrested, brutalized, and publicly executed. They were so bereft and afraid that they tried to disappear into the darkness. What they did not know was that in fewer than forty years Jerusalem itself would fall to the Romans. The beautiful temple would be as utterly destroyed as the people's dreams of earthly glory. The disciples might as well have sold their possessions, as Jesus had instructed, because nothing remained.

Jesus had tried to prepare them for this. He had told them of purses that grow old, and treasures that thieves take and moths devour. He had tried to tell them of the hidden treasure that would endure. The old has to die before the new can come. The treasure of today has to tarnish and peel and break. The hopes and dreams of one age have to crumble and disappear. It is all preparation for an empty tomb and a risen Christ, for Pentecost and the Holy Spirit, and for proclaiming to the world the kingdom of God and its hidden, but eternal, treasure.

There are implications almost hidden in Jesus' words, ***"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*** First, if you want to know what you truly love, see where you have put your treasure. How do you spend your money? Where do your resources go? Second, if you want a change of heart, if you want to value things that really matter, put your treasure where you want your heart to go. Jesus' words are true. Your treasure and your heart tend to go together. If you would like to discover the hidden treasures that thieves cannot steal and moths cannot devour, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.