

Genesis 15:1-6, Luke 12:32-40
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Treasure on Earth
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Jesus said to the disciples "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

On this glorious summer day--a treasure in itself--I want to share some thoughts about Treasures

But first let's look at the timely message that begins both the text from Genesis and from the Gospel of Luke. "Do not be afraid."

I didn't choose the scriptures for today, by the way. Episcopalians follow a common lectionary we share with other American denominations. That means the preacher is given a different selection each week, dealt a particular hand of cards. Written thousands of years ago, these scriptures are timeless, like all great literature; through them the Holy Spirit speaks to us here and now.

"Do not be afraid."

Today, fear is in the air! Everywhere! Fear dominates the news on TV, radio, the Internet. Sadly, fear sells. The media are in the market.

Even the weather reports bring us disaster stories. Do you remember when the weather WASN'T a cause for fright? Now we're privy to news of storms, floods, droughts, tsunamis all around the world as they happen!

I swore off weather.com for a while because the local forecast was buried in photos and links to catastrophic stories. It was better when I checked this week.

"Do not be afraid," God said to Abram. "Do not be afraid," said the Angel Gabriel to Mary of Nazareth. "Do not be afraid," Jesus said to his disciples.

"Do not be afraid" is ancient wisdom from many traditions. Long before we knew about the biology of fear, our forebears knew the dangers. Of course, fear is vital in an immediate life-threat: avoiding an accident, or fleeing a burning building. Once triggered, the automatic nervous system sets off the kind of swift reaction that saved us from saber-toothed tigers in our cave-dwelling days. The danger: that degree of fear will override the cerebral cortex, the part of the brain that governs reason, logic, judgement.

Most of the crises in modern life have long-term implications; they demand our reason, our judgment. We have to temper the danger of unfettered fear. That means being aware of our own bodily reactions and calming ourselves in the moment. A few deep breaths really help bring us back to the present. We can avoid things that needlessly stir us up: news sources, people, or situations. Switch off! Change the subject to something hopeful, life-giving.

Change the energy within you; change the energy around you.

Do not be afraid! Be present to the abundant beauty, kindness, and goodness in the here and now.

Seek the facts! A few minutes' search on the Internet will help put things in perspective. While every crime is lamentable, for instance, the fact is that violent crime in America has been declining for decades--and still is.

Every terrorist attack strikes at our hearts. The vast majority of terrorist attacks take place far away. Now they're in the Middle East. Before 9/11 it was Latin America. Statistically, in the USA, you and I are hundreds of times more likely to be killed by lightning than by a terrorist, and many thousands of times more likely to die in an auto crash.

The stats posted by Dutch group, datagraver.com (data digger in English) show that even with the recent attacks in Belgium and France, terrorism in Western Europe has declined steadily and significantly since the late 1970s.

It's true that ISIS has stepped up their news-grabbing terrorist attacks. That's to counter the truth that they are **losing** ground every day, **losing** the war for territory and power. Why don't we get to hear that good news?

Do not be afraid. Fear has long been the tool of demagogues and dictators, tyrants and bullies.

The antidote is trust: trusting in reason, trusting in history, trusting in facts, trusting our experience of the goodness all around us every day.

Trust your own mind and heart.

Trust in God.

Trust in God's gracious provision, Jesus says.

That brings us to Treasure. Implicitly, Jesus asks the question: Where does our treasure lie?

Where does **your** treasure lie?

For a long time, I thought about treasure in material terms. I was an art-museum curator. My business, quite literally, was to store up treasures on earth: to acquire beautiful works of art for the museums and communities I served. It was a privilege to do that and to know the generous benefactors who support museums like our own MIA. But my life was my work. I was not a person of faith and my values were pretty superficial. If you had asked me to define my treasure then, I probably would have told you about beautiful **things** I owned and about my bank account..

Jesus reminded his disciples that earthly treasure is ephemeral. And it's true. Museums go to great lengths to preserve their holdings, to be sure that neither thieves nor vermin get in. But no material thing is eternal.

We do have treasures on earth, of course. A crisis can bring them clearly into focus.

An older friend of mine learned that early in her married life.

This friend, whom I'll call Peggy, is a very successful entrepreneur. She dresses with style. She has a wonderful eye and she loves the beautiful things that fill her houses in the city and country. But she holds it all very lightly. She knows she could leave it in a moment; because once she did.

Peggy's children were small when she realized that her husband, their father, was dangerously mentally ill. She took the children, went to a small town some distance away. Leaving in haste, they carried very little with them. They lived in a simple motel for some time.

In hiding, of necessity she was isolated from her friends, her work, her church, her home. Stripped of all that, she dug deeply. Always a person of faith, Peggy grew in the consolation of God's presence. She found how truly her treasure lay there, and in the safety of her children. Knowing that her true home was in the heart of God, she found a new kind of freedom. She knew for sure what really mattered. Faith and heart, aligned within her, strengthened her. Once her husband got help, the family was reunited.

Peggy's troubles were not over then. Her husband remained unstable, his life full of crises that she coped with for years until he died. She has endured other, tragic losses, too--including the violent death of a grandchild--heartbreaks that make you wonder how she can stand it. She grieves them deeply as they come; she remains unbroken. She is grounded in the faith she found in that terrifying time, early on. AND she is one of the most loving, joy-filled people I will ever know.

Peggy is not afraid. She knows where her treasure lies.

Dear ones, the best things in life aren't things—not at all!

Now I know where MY treasure lies--the "unfailing treasure here on earth" that Jesus spoke about. I have a purse that will never wear out, a boundless treasure house, in fact. It holds "crown jewels" like Peggy's love and stories of my precious friendship with her and others. My treasure house is enormous, ever expanding, and completely portable. It's the memory chamber of my heart--an eternal repository of love and hope, courage and inspiration.

Each of us has such a treasure house within, a sanctuary. Be still and your hearts will lead you there.

What is your eternal treasure?

As you savor the final days of summer, why not some time recognizing your heart's treasure? You might even make an inventory of your "crown jewels" and savor that, especially, too.