

Ninth Sunday in Pentecost, August 10, 2025.

St. Michael's Church

The Rev. Joshua Wong

Gospel reading: Luke 12:32-40

*Let us pray:*

Gracious God, we ask for your help to be ready for your return. We confess that we often prioritize earthly possessions and anxieties over the treasures you offer in heaven. Forgive us for our lack of faith and for the times we have been distracted by the things of this world. Amen.

Today's Gospel seems to continue the same theme as last Sunday's Gospel, when Jesus gives the parable of a wealthy merchant who gained the whole world but lost his soul. The rich man was successful materialistically, and relied on his wealth. The parable says that he didn't have enough space to store his grain, so he built even a bigger barn to store them. He said to his soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.'

This matter of priority has been a theme throughout our recent lectionary readings. Last week in Colossians, Paul says, "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died,

and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.”

Similarly, today’s Gospel warns us to invest in God’s kingdom rather than the world, because just like the rich merchant, we also don’t not know when our hour will come when God calls us home. But, in today’s Gospel, Jesus is even more clear and direct. He says, “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.

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. This is a tough reality check in our modern life in America where money and status are priority. We work hard all our lives to earn as much as we can to secure for our future. But here, God is teaching the opposite. Jesus says, “Sell your possessions, and give alms.” In another word, share what you have. Jesus gives us a new way of thinking, a new reality. A heavenly way of thinking. I don’t believe God is asking us to be lazy and not work hard and earn money, for God is also the one who gifts us with talents to share with the world, but what God is saying here in these passages is that money is not reliable, and think of others who have less than yourself, don’t be self-centered. If that is all we care about, building barns for ourselves, and not

sharing them with others, then, that is not a heavenly way to think. An important other side to this way of thinking is that God reminds us that he is generous beyond human understanding. Jesus promises that he is faithful to all of our needs. There are many scripture passages that reminds us that God provides beyond man's expectation. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Many of you know about the growing idea among Americans based on Ayn Rand's philosophy. Alisa Rosenbaum, better known by her pen name Ayn Rand was a Russian-born American writer and philosopher who was known for developing a philosophical system called Objectivism. She advocated reason and rejected faith and religion. She supported rational and ethical egoism as opposed to altruism and hedonism. Her books have sold over 37 million copies and her philosophy "Objectivism" describes the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose. Rand argued that ethical egoism is the guiding moral principle, and that individuals should exist for his own sake, neither

sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. She referred to egoism as “the virtue of selfishness.”

But Jesus teaches us the opposite. He keeps us focused. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Jesus’ teachings are all about generosity and love for others.

Priority is a decision we have to make each day as followers of Christ. Who do we love and trust above all else? What is your treasure? Is it our education, our social status, our bank account, and/or our family? Do we believe that God’s mercy sustains our lives, or do we strive for earthly accomplishments and personal value over the poor and needy?

Sometimes when we read the passage that says, “Sell your possessions, and give alms,” we may say to God, “Not now,” I’m busy setting up my life, my career, my family...wait till my children are grown up and I’m retired, than I’ll serve you.

But this is not Jesus’ instructions. This scripture is filled with action words, and it is time sensitive. We can read and feel a sense of urgency. Here, he teaches us that even the owner of the house did not know what hour the thief would break in.

Jesus says, “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

I recently read a book from Father Richard Rohr entitled “Falling Upward: A spirituality for the two halves of our life. His book compares our lives to a container. Father Richard Rohr is an American Franciscan Priest whose teachings focus on "priority living," emphasizing a shift in focus from the ego-driven pursuits of the first half of life to a more contemplative, compassionate, and love-centered existence in the second half of life. He writes:

“In the first half of life, you are devoted to establishing yourself; you focus on career and on finding friends and a partner, or being a parent; you are crafting your identity. Spiritually, people in the first half of life are often drawn to order, and to religious routine. Imagine this as the outside of your “container.”

But then—a crisis happens. Some kind of falling, a job loss, fortunes loss, health issues...it may even undo your spiritual life. For Fr. Rohr, true spiritual growth requires letting go of this "false self" and its attachments to things that provide a temporary sense of security and identity which often fail to bring lasting fulfillment. But the growth, the second half of life, doesn't necessarily happen on its own. You can stay stuck in it if you wish, or you may even refuse the second half.

If you welcome the second half of life, you will find spiritual maturity. That breakthrough in life and faith can occur when we relinquish what is familiar and go toward the unknown. Fr. Rohr agrees that spiritual maturity, or "falling upward", can often be found through moments of letting go of what has been built. Rohr stresses the importance of moving away from a transactional understanding of faith to a compassion for others. We are not trying to master a lot of details or facts about our faith, but more working to allow our faith to master us. We begin to follow the example of Jesus's teachings on love as the prime directive.

Bruce Feiler is an American writer who authored a book entitled, *Life Is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age*. He writes that life transitions are not linear, they come at any time when we least expect it. He coins a term "life-quake" which is a transition of such great magnitude that it changes our meaning, purpose or direction.

This navigation of change is what Father Rohr speaks about when we develop what is inside our container, the beginning of shifting our focus not on our own ambition anymore, but on Christ. A part of us dies in the transition from focusing on outside the container to inside the container, for we must relinquish

a past version of ourselves to become the person waiting for us on the other side. There we learn to hear a deeper voice of God than we have ever heard before. Often, it may sound a lot like the voices of risk, of trust, of surrender, of soul, of 'common sense,' of destiny, of love, of your deepest self.

Maybe you had those moments as well, when the outside of your container crumbled. Maybe it was unexpected trauma? This is why it is so important to develop the inside of your container. By attending church on a regular basis, and by living a life of prayer, meditation, and daily devotion, by finding ways to volunteer in serving God and others, by living in the life of a Christian community, we invest in building and strengthening our inner container.

By choosing to prioritize our life with God, and by discovering where our true treasure is, we will begin to find our faith in God. This is what Jesus meant about “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Let us continue to prepare and be ready for the Lord. Build within our lives containers where unfailing treasures in heaven are stored. The Gospel reminds us to "Be dressed for action and have our lamps lit for blessed are those whom God finds alert when he returns." Amen.