

Oh man. Oh man, oh man, oh man. Y'all, I'm a little nervous about this morning's sermon. That Gospel reading has what I think is one of the most challenging lines in all of scripture. It's so subtle, we almost miss it: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." It's kinda the Bible's version of "voting with your wallet." And sure, there's some truth in that, but it's way, way more complicated. Because we're talking about money, and money's always more complicated. But money isn't complicated because it's fat or skinny stacks. Money's complicated because of what it represents. It's power and luxury and security when you've got it. And it's worry and discomfort and danger when you don't got it. Money's a whole bunch more still, and it's more than what I'm gonna be able to name 'cause money's a lot. Down in our bones, we know about money. We know how it feels not to have enough, and some of us know how it feels never to have to worry about it. And probably all of us know how it feels to think about it a little too much.

But if you're an astute scripture reader, you probably noticed that this week, Jesus doesn't actually use the word "money." Nope. This morning, it's treasure. And I think treasure is a different monster from money altogether. "Treasure" evokes images of Gollum consumed by jealousy. It isn't limited to money. Treasure is all sorts of things. It *can* be money or jewels or a dragon's hoard of gemstones and gold. It can wait in a chest under secret sands marked with an X. But treasure can be so much more wholesome, too. It can be time or energy or love or affection. It can be the way your youngest's chin dimples with a giggle fit or catching your spouse's eye across a crowded room. Your treasure is where your heart is. That can be a gift to the world, or it can be a pox.

This saying of Jesus' works both directions. Our treasure follows our heart, right? Love begets cherishing. That seems straightforward enough. But what's more interesting to me today is what happens the other way around. Let's take "treasure" to mean "time" for an example. I spend my treasure (my time) on potted plants and wouldn't you know it, suddenly the time and energy and care and study and delicate watering schedules and tedious pest elimination routines compile into a heart that's been led down this path. I treasure my houseplants in a way I never thought I could before. I've become one of *those* plant people. But I'm also weirdly guarded about them. Like, yes, they are beautiful and add an ambiance to nearly every room of my life that I do treasure, but I have my Gollum and the Ring moments when someone asks for a cutting. See what I mean? Just as fully as our hearts pull us to invest our treasure, our treasures pull our hearts, too.

Ok, so this all makes me wonder, when we choose to spend our treasure in certain ways, what do we lose at the same time? What does one path pull our hearts to and the same path pull us away from? I love my wife, my friends, my chosen family, my pets, my people. All y'all are treasures. But spending time with this one here means there's less time to spend with that one over there. That's tough. We talked about something similar with my sister-in-law's family bucket-list trip to Iceland. Going with them is a treasure that means I lose some of the treasure here in the process. But the heart's leading, and many of you have spoken your hearts and your treasures along the way. But I wonder if that's a fallacy. The fallacy that something like love or the heart or treasures are inherently a zero-sum game. Like, the treasures I store up are finite and could run out. Maybe it's more true to say that the treasures of the heart are different from the pages of a financial document. Where the bottom line rules a budget, the inexplicably expansive treasures of the heart cannot run out.

Now that's all well and good and maybe even true, but Jesus throws that insanely challenging line at us in the context of telling us to get rid of everything we own. Wonderful, as a priest, my job would be a little more secure if you would just get right on that. I, of course, will do the same. Except for maybe not my treasured houseplants. Surely Jesus didn't mean those. He probably also didn't mean all those antiques just waiting for a

buyer over in Bouckville. And he almost certainly didn't mean the clanking pick-up truck that's so useful for hauling rocks. But everything else, maybe. I do have a lot of treasures that my heart just can't part with. "For where your treasures are, there your heart is also." It's not that I love my houseplants more than Jesus, it's just that...you know what, there's no good way to talk out of that, is there? And that's why I'm saying it's one of the most subtle and intensely challenging lines of scripture. It gives us just enough room to squirm, and I hate it and I love it, too.

This morning, for the first time in literal years, we get to start passing the plate again. I know this will absolutely sound strange, so I just ask you to bear with me for a second: passing the plate is one of those aspects of the service I have missed the most. See? Told ya it would sound strange. It's not my most-missed for the reasons you might expect. It's not that I particularly like the shade of green of the US Dollar. It's not that each of those little bits of security feature laden paper connects to a paycheck. It's not even that our generosity allows for the church to do a little more good in this world, though, if I'm honest, all of those things have some truth to them. No, the reason I've missed this is deeply rooted in what that liturgical action represents. Way, way back in the day, when the bread and the wine came forward from the back of the church, there was a practical aspect -- how do you get the bread and the wine from way back there all the way up here? Why not just put the bread and the wine on the altar to begin with, then you'd never have to worry about culinary transportation mid-service? Well, I'm glad you asked.

The reason is that the church may not have actually had the bread and the wine in the first place. It had to come from somewhere, and that somewhere was the people. The farmer that raised the wheat, the worker that harvested it, the owner of the grist mill that grinded it down, the baker that shaped it into a loaf and cooked 'til golden brown. They all sat in those pews. And the farmer that raised the grapes, the workers that harvested them, the feet that stomped 'em, the cooper that made the cask, and the vintner that balanced everything just so. They all sat in the pews, too. The bread and the wine got brought forward because way back when, the bread and the wine arrived when the people did, and they waited in the pews for just the right moment to stand proud and offer the literal fruits of their labors -- the treasure of their life, their professions, their time, their sweat, their work, their community -- to offer every part of themselves to God.

So what gives with that tray of dollar bills? It's the exact same thing. Most of us don't grow wheat and most of us don't stomp on grapes. Shoot, we order wafers from a catalog and buy wine from a liquor store. We still labor, but the fruits of our labors look a little different. When we finish the day, what do we have to show for the work we've done? Not a dinner loaf or a flagon of wine, but a paycheck, one kind of treasure exchanged for another. So, when the plate comes back around for the first time since the Third Sunday of Lent back in 2020, what we all place inside its rounded bowl is nothing less than the fruit of our labor, the treasure of our lives, our professions, our time, our sweat, our work, our community, every part of ourselves, offered to God. We place all that we are-- all of ourselves waiting in these pews -- we place all that we are in that plate. And then we stand, proud. And we carry it all the way up there. And we set it there, to stay on the altar as sacred. Because you are sacred and your offering to God, your sacrifice is sacred.

You know, I was curious just how much of my treasure that I put in that plate represents. Not the dollar amount, though if any of you're curious, I'd be happy to tell you. No, I was curious how much time my chicken-scratched check means. How much of *that* treasure do I send up to the altar? Well, I did the math, and it comes out to about 4 hours a week. If my fuzzy math is right, I'm setting aside four hours of my labor each week as a sacrifice at this altar. Does that mean the other 164 hours of the week go to wild and crazy stuff? Of course not, but it does mean that every week, no matter what's happening or how things have shaped up, four hours are God's and God's alone. I don't grow wheat and I don't make wine, but I do make something. I do

make some kind of treasure. And when my treasure rests on that altar alongside your treasure and the fruits of all our labors -- well, it turns out Jesus was right -- our hearts rest there, also.