



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Treasures in Heaven”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 17, 2025

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:19-21 (*The Inclusive Bible*)
(Jesus is teaching) *“Don't store up earthly treasures for yourselves, which moths and rust destroy and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal them. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be as well.”*

Sermon

I've been back for three weeks now, but I'm still really grateful to look out and have people here. As much as I enjoyed convalescing, it's good to be back. (*Laughter*) Thank you all for being here, especially in August. This is great!

Well, I don't know about you, but to me, current events are very strange. I mean, if you're “MAGA,” everything's great. I understand that. But if you're concerned with human rights, it's a tough time. If you like the planet underneath your feet, it's really hard to see environmental protections being undone. It's hard to even understand the people that have been complaining about cancel culture feeling okay about censoring the Smithsonian, critical race theory, anything that would give a measuring rod to the claims that are being made. People that have talked about small government my whole life are now celebrating as federal troops seize the streets, and women lose the right to make the most personal decisions that they could make. I think at times like this, we need to go deep and find sources of power inside ourselves. Because when you look around, it's hard to see a whole lot of hope.

But I think that's what Jesus was addressing. He lived in a time of oppression, a time when leadership didn't care what happened to the people. And again, he started by taking people away from the city to the lakeside and said, *“Let's study the birds. Let's study the wildflowers and remember what it means to be a human being,”* because that's what can get lost. We have plenty of resources in us, particularly if we come together in community to get through this together. But we have to remember both our need and our power in a situation like that. Jesus said, *“Don't store up treasures in heaven.”* The word for treasure is *thesaurus*, I always like that. It's not just like “gold,” it's the whole *context*.

What I think is being said is not that we shouldn't worry about the world, just wait for heaven to come. That's about as escapist as it gets. What I'd like to share that you can't see in English is that that phrase, "the Kindom of God," in Hebrew, is an adverb. It's not a noun. It's not so much a place as *qualities* that are there in our lives, but we can't see them, hear them, feel them. When a teacher teaches in parables, they're trying to help us become aware of things that are already here. It's one example that helps us trace that out in our lives.

Now, I'll be honest with you, if heaven is just a *place*, I don't have a lot of wisdom for you. Never been there. I'm hearing a lot of preachers talk about it, but I don't have that much faith in preachers. I don't think we should. (*Laughter*) What a preacher should do is provoke the questions, help us find within ourselves this deeper awareness. But if heaven is a state of mind, then it may be just what we're looking for in this time. That may be exactly what Jesus is talking about, how we find peace and joy in times when you can't find it externally.

Not surprisingly, I have three suggestions. (That's required by law - *Laughter*). The first is that heaven isn't getting what we want. It's realizing who we are. I'm ripping off Marianne Williamson with that one. She used to say, "*Inner peace is not getting what we want. It's realizing who we are or remembering who we are.*" We forget our humanity. We forget the life within us, and we think we're the trappings of our life. The problem is, thieves and moths and politicians break in and take things, and it breaks our heart.

I want to encourage you this week to think about what really belongs to you in life. What belongs to you and what belongs to time? What are you counting as yours that's going to break your heart when it disappears? And what is that which abides all through your life?

Last week, I talked about how life breaks into form and flow. We like the forms, but what Jesus is saying is those are transient by nature. Forms are impermanent. What is that *flow* that has given you life and being? What is that creative principle, either of God or of the universe, that has brought you here? Because that's the core of your being, much more than what you think or what you've been taught.

I think Jesus is talking about that when he says, "*Kindom of heaven.*" What is the creative principle that brings us into being? It's deeper in us than anything that happens to us. But we're most likely to forget about it because we're so focused on what happens to us or what we have or what we need or want that we lose the sense of the life within us.

The first thing I hear and what Jesus is saying is that whatever he means by heaven, it's not getting what we want. It's remembering who we are at the most profound and deepest level.

Then second, I think the heaven that Jesus is talking about, it's not a place we go after we die. I think it's the depth of living that's already available to us. I think Jesus believed that eternity has already started. But the way the Church sometimes says it is you have to wait till you die before the good stuff comes. We'll take all the short-term stuff. We'll take 10% of your property. But then when you're dead, you're going to be so happy. (*Laughter*) It's a good gig if you can get it.

The life force within you is deeper than your personality. That's why it calls you to go to places you wouldn't normally go. Nobody would take up bungee jumping; nobody in their right mind. *(Laughter)* It's the life energy within us that calls us out of safety into the adventure of living.

The horrific political situation we find ourselves in could be understood as an invitation to heroism. Heroes and sheroes. To respond to the need that is there. Our heart in the tradition that Jesus came up through, doesn't really belong to us. That's why in the Psalms, sometimes they're trying to talk to their heart to come back and lodge in the chest. When we lose touch with life, we forget the treasures of the heart. And what Jesus said is, "*Where your treasure is, your heart will be.*" So, if I spend all week thinking about *things*, if I spend all week worrying about *things*, that's where my heart's going to go when I need it in my chest. We need to realize that we have to garden, we have to care for our hearts. That's especially important in a time like this, when there's so much cruelty, so much dishonesty.

I feel sorry for children who will have to learn what a President should be. Nobody would want their children to grow up with so little commitment to truth, bullying people, using the office for personal gain. We cannot let that in our inner sanctum. It's been said it's not the water outside the boat that sinks you, it's the water you let inside the boat. And that's doubly true for the human heart. If we let someone punch our buttons, we lose control of our own heart. You have within you a peace, a joy, and a compassion that other people can't get to unless you let them. So the second thing I hear in what Jesus is teaching is that heaven isn't a *place* so much as a *principle*, and you don't have to wait till you die. It's the depth of living in the here and now.

Then finally, and this is the hardest one, is that heaven is not a reward. It's a *quality* of living. It's not an escape from the suffering of the world. It's the art of turning suffering into compassion. When we stop worrying about our own salvation, the Church has been the worst example of getting people so concerned about their own salvation that they let the world go to Hell.

Suffering and life are inseparable. Tich Nhat Hanh has a great sermon on this, how "*the rose can't grow without garbage. What is alive grows out of what has died.*" And those two are inseparable because they're both part of a larger life. And that's the life to which Jesus and Buddha and all the great teachers call us. To get beyond your personal life to the great life that wants to be lived *through* you. Because that's what keeps our lives from being a tragedy.

Some of the greatest gifts to humankind have come from some of the shortest lives. If you go through and look at your heroes, I bet most of them did not have a fair life. But instead of recoiling and shrinking, they made their lives a gift to you and me. We can do that too. Happiness is not something we find. Happiness is an art that we learn; to take what is happening to us and turn it into beauty and compassion and meaning. Viktor Frankl was in the concentration camps in Germany, and he struggled with this as much as any human being ever. He *chose* to be happy even there. He *chose* to be loving even there.

What I hear Jesus saying in this third point is that heaven is not an escape from suffering. It's a *transformation* of suffering. Because even if you can escape suffering, somebody you love and care about cannot. In our current day, we shouldn't be comfortable until Gaza is safe. We shouldn't be comfortable until immigrants can trust that they're not going to be deported in the

middle of the night. There are broken hearts all over the place, and we can heal both other people and ourselves at the same time by going more deeply within us, not using the current events as an excuse for shutting down the light within us. Realizing that whatever happiness means, it's not getting what we want, it's discovering and manifesting who we are. That whatever we mean by happiness is not a place we go to after we die, but a profound depth of living that's available to us now.

Then finally, that whatever we mean by happiness is not an escape from suffering, but a profound art that transforms suffering into compassion. If heaven is a place, I don't have anything for you. Never been there. I don't know. But if I understand Jesus correctly, and heaven is a state of mind, then I think it could be exactly what we're looking for in this painful and confusing time.

Well, that's my understanding. We'll take a moment for you to think about how you would understand these words.

Benediction

Thank you again. I'm still at the modeling stage where I'm just grateful to see everybody. And the choir, I haven't heard the choir in five months. So thank you all. That's really good.

Well, it seems to me that when we look around us and we see impotence, a desert, or not a lot of hope on the surface of things. I think the great teachers are not asking us to believe in magical places or people or things, but trying to lead us to our own hearts. Because if we can live there, we can face almost anything that comes along.

So as you leave and go out into your life, whatever that means this week, please remember that the love that gave you birth goes with you. The love that Jesus and Buddha and all these great teachers, that personal love that lives within us, that love goes with you. Finally, that mysterious love that we call the Holy Spirit, which is the tie that binds us to all of being and to the stars, these three loves go with you now and remain with you always. Peace.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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