

Sunday Sermon August 10, 2024

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

I've been thinking a lot about my dad lately. At 99 ½ he is well into his final chapter, and it's likely that his decline will continue, so I've been thinking about the good times along the way.

When I was growing up we had a small cabin on a stream in northern Wisconsin. My parents built the cabin because my dad had a very demanding and stressful job, and he needed a place to go to "get away." Every weekend we went "up north" - spring, summer, fall and winter- and we spent every vacation at that special place as well. Fishing mostly – on beautiful summer days and even in the bitter cold of winter.

A few years ago I was visiting dad, and we decided to take a drive to see the old cabin. It was amazing to travel those roads again. Some things had not changed very much, some had changed a lot, but as we rounded the big curve on Brook Lane my heart sank. The cabin was gone, replaced by a modern home.

Now the cabin itself was nothing special. It didn't even have electricity or running water at first, but there were so many good times, so many happy memories. My dad taught me to fish there, and how to clean them. There were the meals at the small kitchen table and then card games by lantern light. Campfires... Catching frogs in the stream. Watching the bats and the fireflies in the evenings. Raccoons tipping over the garbage cans. The sound of rain on the roof.

It was there that I heard stories of my parents growing up and how they met, and married and raised their children. There was always time for stories and laughter. Even though I never met two of my grandparents, I got to know them there through those stories around the table, in the boat, at the campfire.

On the way home that day, as I sat brokenhearted that the cabin was gone, my dad and I shared memories of all the wonderful times spent there, and my dad confessed that the place had saved him. He had become so consumed with work and being successful that he was sacrificing his health, his marriage and his family.

That humble little refuge reminded him of what was really important in life. And even though the building is no longer there, what happened there will live forever in our minds and hearts for while the physical structure is gone, the spiritual enlightenment gained by those experiences remains. And they inspire.

Jesus says, “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.” There’s nothing wrong with things as long as they are not ends in themselves but, rather, a means to a greater end.

A cabin is a place to spend time with family, to enjoy the beauty of creation, to decompress and put life in perspective, to come together. That’s why it didn’t matter that it was a little ramshackle at times. We weren’t trying to impress the neighbors.

We just needed a place to go to remind us what life was really all about. To be reminded that the goal of our lives is not to have but to love, that what satisfies us most is not acquiring more and more but being in communion -connected- with God and one another with bonds of love.

There’s nothing wrong with things or money as long as they are not ends in themselves, but rather a way to do good. For by doing good one gains heavenly riches.

I believe the message of the Gospel today could not be clearer.

We live in a material world, filled with material things, and we are prone to wanting more and bigger and better, thinking things will make us happy. Thinking we are at the center. But things are only a means to an end. They can connect us to the spiritual world. The spiritual world is communion, communion with God and with one another. Communion at the campfire, the kitchen table, and altars everywhere. Communion that gives us a taste of new life here in this world, and a taste of the life beyond this one.

It was only this many years later that I appreciate that that small cabin on the stream was a place that gave me a taste of the Kingdom of God.

This time of year, I also think about all the weeks I have spent at camp over the years.

No one goes to camp for the good food or the comfortable beds or the luxurious accommodations. No one goes for the material stuff. We go for the spiritual riches: joy, laughter, singing, acceptance, friendship, care and love. We go for communion- with God and each other.

The kingdom of God is communion. It is being connected at the deepest level, loving God and neighbor and being unconditionally loved. This is our deepest hunger, to love and be loved.

The quest for more can distract and get in the way. Or material things can be kept in their proper perspective as blessings that are a means to an end. That's what Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel – be focused on an unfailing treasure in heaven, be focused on love.

For the treasure that Jesus came to give cannot be found in wood, brick or stone. It can't be stored in a bank or entered on a spreadsheet. The spiritual treasures that Christ came to bring can be found in our communion with God and with one another. Communion is the heavenly treasure that outlasts earthly things.

May we treasure what lasts unto eternal life, and keep the eyes of our heart focused on heavenly riches. Amen