

WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS Rev. Jason Santalucia

A sermon preached at Valley Presbyterian Church
in Brookfield, Connecticut
on October 22, 2023

Text: Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Frederick Buechner was a pastor and an extremely prolific writer. He wrote a gazillion books on faith and spiritual life, and in one of them he made the comment that if you really want to know what you value in life, what’s important to you, what your priorities are, you can’t tell by your words. You have to look at your feet. What he meant was, we can tell ourselves all kinds of things, but our feet don’t lie. If we look at where they take us in the course of a day or a week or a month, they’ll tell us the truth, whether we like it or not.

So I gave that a try, and it was pretty humbling. For a couple of days last week, my feet spent the most amount of time outside raking leaves and stacking firewood. They also spent a good bit of time up on a ladder cleaning out gutters and installing gutter guards. And what does that say about me? It says A) I have a pretty boring life, and I need to get a hobby; and B) what I value the most is apparently my yard and my house. Which is kind of embarrassing because as I pastor I feel like that shouldn’t be what matters to me the most. I feel like I should be more focused on things like faith, kindness, love, compassion. But that’s not what my feet were telling me—at least on those two days.

Well, in the gospel reading this morning, Jesus is saying basically the same thing as Buechner, except that for him the thing that

reveals what we truly value isn’t our feet but our money. “Where your treasure is there your heart will be also,” he says. In other words, What you do with your money shows what’s really important to you. And one thing we can do with that is to hear it as a call for integrity. If we have a certain value, we shouldn’t just pay it lip service. We should do something with it. We shouldn’t just talk about it. We should go and live it out.

Now, in the church, we call that “stewardship.” When you get right down to it, stewardship is simply living out our values—particularly the values that come from what we believe about God. So for instance, we believe that everything we have is a gift from God, and a value that comes from that is generosity—giving to others the way God has given to us. We believe that God has a special concern for the weak and the vulnerable, and a value that comes from that is justice—doing something about inequality and oppression. We believe that God is a Trinity, and a value that comes from that is community—living in relationship with one another.

Stewardship, then, is how we take our beliefs and values and make them more than just words—more than just things we say in church. Stewardship is how we put our beliefs and values into action. Which doesn’t mean we have to go out and change the world in order to be

good stewards. If you're Bill Gates, and you can afford to spend a few billion dollars on eradicating malaria, that's great. You should totally do that. But most of us aren't Bill Gates. And that's fine because stewardship is not about how much we give. It's about the choices we make, right down to the smallest choices we make everyday. Like when we take the \$5.95 we were going to spend on a pumpkin spice latte and put it in the offering plate instead—as an expression of generosity. Like when we cancel a streaming service we hardly ever watch anyway and give the twelve bucks a month we save to mission—as an act of justice. Like when we take the cash back we get from our credit card and donate it to the Deacon's fund—as a commitment to community.

From the perspective of stewardship, all those little choices matter. All those little choices have meaning. Because stewardship is about everything we do after we say, "I believe." And I didn't come up with that line. I stole it from another pastor, who probably stole it from someone else. But wherever it came from, it's a nice line because it captures the essence of what we're talking about. It captures the essence of stewardship. Whatever our financial situation may be—rich or poor or somewhere in between—stewardship is about using the money we have faithfully, in response to God's presence in our lives.

It's also a nice line because it goes beyond just money. Another pastor I used to know and occasionally steal things from used to say, "Stewardship is about how you use your time, talent, and treasure." And then he'd ask, "What was the third thing?" and people would say, "treasure," and he'd get a little grin on his face and say, "No, the third thing was 'and'." The point being, stewardship is about how we use everything we have—not just our money, but our time, our energy, our skills, our intelligence, our creativity.

Stewardship is about using all that we have and all that we are faithfully. And I bet every single one of you can think of someone in your life who modeled that kind of generous spirit.

Maybe a parent or grandparent. Maybe a friend. Maybe a co-worker.

For me, it was my in-laws. They grew up during the Korean war. They both lost their homes and nearly starved to death. They came here in the mid-sixties, and my father-in-law went to seminary, while my mother-in-law worked in a sewing factory during the day and cleaned offices at night. They struggled for many years, but they were always faithful givers. They always set aside a portion of what they had to give as an offering. And my mother-in-law used to tell me that sometimes that was hard. Sometimes they had to give up other things. But for them it went back to that idea of integrity. They believed that God had been with them during the war, and that God had provided for them in the years that followed, and they gave to the church as a way of saying thank you. That was their value—gratitude—and they lived it out every Sunday when the offering plate came around.

So this is the time of year when the church asks you to give some special thought to stewardship. You've all received a pledge card in the mail, and we're going to consecrate them in worship on November 5. So between now and then, I ask you to think about what you believe, and the values that come from those beliefs, and how you feel God is calling you to live them out. That's between you and God, so please spend some time praying about it.

I also ask you to look at your feet. Out of all the places they could have taken you this morning, they brought you here, so I know this place means something to you. I know this community is an important part of your life. So let that be part of your discernment as well.

And finally, I just want to say thank you for all of your faithful giving in the past. This is an incredibly generous congregation, and I really mean that. So I look forward to Consecration Sunday. It's going to be a wonderful celebration of all the good things God is doing here at Valley. Thanks be to God, and amen.