

Proper 14C
Luke 12:32-40
The Reverend Bonnie Underwood
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Real Security

As an Episcopalian, I love our use of the lectionary, a three-year schedule of Bible readings providing us the chance to see the Scriptures as a whole, an extended story of God's great love for humankind and deep desire for relationship with us.

But at times there are gaps in the lectionary, verses that are skipped. And we see some of that today. So it's important to check how the verses of the day fit within the surrounding passages, to help insure we can better understand the broader context.

Last week Fr. Keith spoke about Jesus' parable of the rich man, a cautionary story reminding us to *be on guard*, for life is about more than an abundance of possessions. And today, we're hearing about our true treasure and being prepared, but there's something in between, and it's an important part of both stories.

The passage we *didn't read* tells us not to worry, for life is about more than our possessions, about more than food or clothing. Jesus tells about the birds *that neither sow nor reap*, yet are fed by God. And we're reminded of the lilies of the field that grow so beautifully without any effort, yet are more resplendent than even Solomon in all his glory.

These verses lead us to today's instruction, as Jesus tells his disciples, *yet again*, to not be afraid, for it is God's gift, God's *great pleasure*, to give us the kingdom.

And this is *immediately* followed by a challenge, a call to action. Care for your neighbors, share what you have, invest your time and resources where it matters, for where your treasure is, there your heart is.

There's so much here, in just a few sentences.

First, Jesus tells us to not be afraid. But how can we *step away* from that endless cycle of anxieties and worries that are so deeply embedded in our human nature?

- If we don't have the basics we need for survival, we can't help but worry about food and clothing.
- And if we have those basics, then we're challenged to develop a better life, so we worry about how to get ahead.
- And if we do get ahead, then we worry about *protecting* what we have and *maintaining* our way of life.

Worrying *is human*, but we need to recognize that it's *rooted* in fear: fear for survival; fear for ourselves, our families; fear for our way of life.

Several years ago, a friend of mine was struggling with a career decision. She had a good job with a great company. But her passion was no longer in her paid position, but in the work she was doing for others, especially the children at the Children's home in Honduras. Most of her free time was spent in supporting these children, whether working on the Board of Directors or helping with mission teams and she felt she may be called to do more. She began to pray for

God's guidance, specifically asking for God to *take away her fear*. Over time, she began to see more clearly how she could live into her great love for these children. Some of you know have met Amanda Scott, who now is a full-time missionary in Honduras, supporting the children of LAMB Institute. With God's help, we can let go of our fear.

Jesus also tells us that where our treasure is, there our hearts are also. What is it that is really important to us? How do we to prioritize our time, resources, and energy?

For years, one friend would call me each time I returned from a mission trip to Honduras. She wanted to hear all about it, especially about the children at the residential home. She'd always ask insightful questions, curious about what I was experiencing and how these trips were affecting my own life. I sensed a real longing within her, a desire to get involved, so I'd routinely let her know about upcoming trips, so she could consider whether it was the right time to come.

But, she couldn't find the time. She would often joke that *all her extra time* was spent on following her favorite college football team. She's an alum of Western Kentucky and a truly voracious fan, intent on attending virtually every game each season, and then attending booster and alum gatherings throughout the off-season. And knowing her work schedule and other family commitments, I could see why it was difficult to find much time and energy to engage in what could be personally as well as spiritually challenging.

Now for all you serious football fans, please don't misunderstand my message . . . I'm not trying to diminish the importance of college ball.

But where do we devote our energies? What could the Spirit show us, if we asked for God's help in discerning *the truth* of how we use our time and resources, the truth of what *we really hold dear*? Would we find that we're striving for that unfailing treasure in heaven, or those things that will rust and decay? *With God's help*, we can discern how to grow in Christ and live into God's purpose, aligning our hearts with the kingdom.

And finally, Jesus asks us to sell our possessions and give alms. This isn't a call to an ascetic life, giving away all that we have, but a call to share.

Each time I return from Honduras, I am so thankful for some of the most basic qualities of our day to day life here at home: safe drinking water, easily available healthy food, decent indoor plumbing, instant hot water. But I also get a deep sense that many *do not realize just how high* our standard of living is within our country, as compared to the rest of the world and I can't help but wonder if this affects how we define when *we have enough*. *What is sufficient* to meet our needs? How often do our clothing, cars, technology — all our things — really *need* to be updated, replaced, or expanded? If we felt we had enough, would it be easier for us to share, easier for us to care for our neighbor? With God's help, we can discover that we do indeed have enough — enough for ourselves and enough to share.

Stepping away from fear. Looking at our priorities. Caring for our neighbor.

There is a sense of urgency in seeing the truth of how we live our lives, for as we continue through our life's journey, *we are formed* by our commitments, our loyalties, and our decisions. *We are shaped* by how closely we align ourselves with the culture's attitudes towards possessions and wealth, by how we spend our time and resources, about by whether we are generous to those in need. Our choices add up to a way of life, and over time, the treasures we have stored may, *in hindsight*, be trivial. I imagine we've all heard of those who regret, later in life, the decisions they've made, wishing that instead they had been more willing to take risks, to

spend more time investing in relationships, and to allow themselves the freedom to love more and acquire less.

Our *real security* is found by accepting God's grace and the truth of eternal life. Hear Jesus' words. This is the time — *to courageously* examine our lives and discover where we *actually* store our treasure; to open our hearts and minds to the Spirit who *will guide us* on Jesus's path of life and light — for God does provide all that we need, and longs for each of us to live lives caring for others. Amen.