

Ash Wednesday Year C
St. Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21
February 10, 2016
St. George's Church Bolton
Fr. Chris

Dust, Sand and Ashes

"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."

Hoarding treasures...the human temptation to put things away for the rainy day, to be prepared. Is this really so foolhardy?

I like to be prepared for come-what-may. *Sometimes I forget what I really need to be prepared for and how to prepare for that.* Instead, I worry about the challenges of life that I learn to fear on TV. So I worry about large snow-storms. I fear hurricanes and other natural disasters. I contemplate what political turmoil might look like in our midst and ponder the risk of a terrorist attack here in Connecticut, though both of these things seem pretty remote, so remote, it is hard to take them as serious worries to prepare for, at least to me.

So how do I prepare, now that I have revealed what I fear? I prepare by buying things, stocking up. Usually this begins with non-perishable foods. Next I prepare by taking stock of the survival items I need from clothing to radios. There are many lists available on line and in books and magazines about the subject that suggest what you will need. And I have purchased

these things and they sit in special air-tight storage containers in my storage unit. And then I forget about them.

Once in a great while I check what I have stored up for those natural disasters that I have prepared for. What I find are food containers with expired dates and inedible foodstuffs. What I find are corroded batteries, whose acid has seeped out and destroyed the flashlights and radios that I left inside them. And then the words of today's Gospel passage echo in my mind: "*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.*" It is as though these words were passing judgment on my own humble efforts, and they are! I cannot save myself by storing up treasure in the closet for the coming days which I fear. I need to confront my fear and *trust God*. I need to place myself in the palms of God's hands and go with God instead of my batteries and canned beans and spam.

However, I have also sought treasures in this life to placate my very human desire for happiness and pleasure. On acquiring such things, I have received the temporary pass from my longings that they brought, but now so many of them populate my storage unit that I do not know where to begin disposing of them. My stored up stuff overwhelms me. And if a hurricane or tornado came and wiped away the contents of my storage unit tomorrow, I would not miss one bit of this stuff because I have lived without this junk for years, as it languished amongst the dust and cobwebs of my storage locker deep in the basement of my building. There they rest, doing no one not a spec of good, hoarded, God only knows why. *But I own this stuff, and what was once a pleasure is now a material, physical burden!* The pleasure has turned into a pain.

The point of this Gospel message and I hope this Lent is to lighten the load, to travel through life without such burdens: Remember: *'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'* Travel light! Live light and be free! Lent is a great time to clean out your closets, cellars and attics on a snowy day when you are trapped inside. Fill up those recycling and trash bins. Give away what might be of value to the poor and those in need. Put this stuff to work for God's purposes, instead of hoarding the wealth in your cellar where it is doing no one any good, least of all you.

Don't think you can leave it for your kids to sort through or sort out what to do with your precious junk! Give them what they might want now, and get rid of the rest, lest they drive up a dumpster after you're gone and dispose of the whole mess of your precious treasures, cursing you every moment they are consumed by doing what you should have done yourself long ago. And the epitaph you leave behind? What a wastrel! What a waste! You might just be consumed in the next life by your stuff, left to wonder about the good you might have done with it.

Lent affords us the opportunity to unload our burdens, both material and spiritual. I know I have plenty of both. It would be my prayer that you can use this Lent to unburden yourself. Let go of the material burdens you no longer need. Free yourself and your home of this stuff. Lighten the load you are trying to carry through this life. Simplify. Live simply that others and you may simply live. Work toward the forgiveness of your own debts, and at the same time, spiritually let go of the indebtedness that others may have toward you. Live debt free, in so far as this is possible, especially when it comes to spiritual debts. Lent is a time to forgive as you have been forgiven.

It is also a time for us to work hard at spiritual unburdening, and this means confronting those things which in our heart of hearts we feel guilty about and those things which we need to change about ourselves. Ask God to help you make these changes this Lent. Seriously engage the process of changing yourself. Desire to become a better you. Unload and free yourselves of the burdens you have been carrying. Life is too short to drag these heavy things all about. *Get rid of them!*

Waves represent the reality of life according to today's *Forward Day by Day* meditation. It was suggested that the waves pounding on the sand and washing it out to sea and then replacing it along the shore is a metaphor for our lives. When we build up our castles in this life, they are truly like the sand castles we built as children at the beach. In the light of day, in the middle of the day of our lives, they rise above the rest of the sand as often things crafted of beauty. And perhaps these castles last until long after we have gone home for the day, until the tide comes and washes them away. The day always comes to an end. It has to, so that it may give birth to another, which will come after. But later the tide always comes. And all things and people return to the God who made them.

Do not forget what you really need to be prepared for and how to prepare for it! Remember, that like the grains of sand that disappear in the waves and the ashes that are quickly dispatched by the wind, you too are but dust and grains of sand, a wondrously built sandcastle, and unto the elements you shall return. AMEN