

Come into the Light
Matthew 6:19-23
March 1, 2017 – Ash Wednesday

Today's scripture reading is a favorite of mine – Don't collect treasures on earth where moths and rust can consume and thieves can break in and steal; but rather collect treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I love that reminder. I think that reminder extremely important – all the "stuff" of earth really isn't what's important. These verses also have a sentimental meaning for me – they were the scripture theme for the first youth retreat I ever conducted, as we tried to emphasize to the kids that their "stuff" really wasn't what was important in their lives.

But, as I considered these verses for this evening, I asked myself, "What is important? What are the treasures of heaven?" Oh there are the good works – feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Surely caring for God's children are things of heaven. But it seems like treasures of heaven are more than just good works. But then. . . Then I read the next verses, verses that aren't in the lectionary for this evening, verses that I've never really considered before in my meditation on "treasures of heaven."

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if the eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness." Friends, this is not a statement of physiology. Rather, it's the light/darkness paradigm again. You remember it from the first chapter of John's Gospel. We read it on Christmas day. "All things came into being through [God]. . . What came into being was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:2-5) Light!!! What a wonderful symbol. It's later in John's Gospel that Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) And connected with that, in the Sermon on the Mount, which we've been studying for the past month, Jesus tells his followers, "You are the light of the world." (Matt 5:14)

I tell you this evening. . . The treasure of heaven is light. Oh, not photons; but the spiritual energy that we get when we cast our eyes upon Jesus. Jesus is the light of the world, and he invites us to come into the light. I've said on numerous times before – one of my favorite words of Christian calling is the word radiate. I've stated that we, as Christians should be so filled with the love of Christ that we can't help but radiate that love to all whom we meet. That love should literally pour off us – the warmth, the joy. . . yes, the light.

And so, I tell you this evening, the true treasure of heaven is our relationship with Jesus Christ. The true treasure of heaven is his invitation to come into his light, that we may have the light of life. And once we're filled with the light we simply can't keep it to ourselves. You can't be on fire with the Holy Spirit, and not have folks notice. It was Charles Wesley, John's brother, who said, "If you catch fire with the Holy Spirit, folks will come from miles around to watch you burn." I'd take that one step further. . . "Folks will come from miles around to catch some of the light." Light. . . Warmth. . . Energy. . . Love. . .

We light candles as a symbol of the energy – the light of the world. But there's another symbol; and that's the cross. You know, I wear a cross around my neck most of

the time. I generally wear one of two crosses. I have a wooden cross that I wear when I'm dressed more casually, and a silver cross that I'm wearing tonight. Both were gifts from my wife. Both remind me of that the love we share is a God-given gift. I don't wear these crosses to advertise that I'm a clergy member or even that I'm a Christian. I don't wear these crosses to advertise. I wear these crosses to remind myself of the love that God has for me. I wear these crosses to remind myself that Christ has invited me into that love, to share that love; and to live a life fueled with the energy of that amazing love.

Friends, God came to earth in the form of a human being, that we might come into an ever closer relationship with the divine. God came to earth in the form of a human being to walk with us, to teach us, to heal us. And the second greatest gift that God could give us is to die for us. The first greatest gift is to rise from the dead with a promise to be with us always. But you'll need to wait for Easter to hear that good news.

This is Ash Wednesday. In a few minutes you'll be invited forward to have the sign of the cross imposed on your forehead in ashes; and you'll hear the words: "From dust you have come and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the Gospel." Indeed Ash Wednesday is a service that reminds us of our mortality; but the service doesn't end there; because, after the imposition of ashes, you are invited to move on to the table, where you will hear: "This is my body, and this is my blood – given for you, that you might have life everlasting." Indeed, that's what it means to be in relationship with Jesus Christ: the ashes of our mortality – yes; but also the body and blood of our salvation.

And so, friends, this Lent, as you consider the treasures of heaven, think about the light, the light of Christ into which you are invited, the light of Christ which you are called to share. And think about the cross as the invitation into that light. It's a little over a year ago that I passed out these pocket crosses, and suggested that you carry it with you to remind yourself of the love that Christ has for you.

If you don't have a cross, or if you've lost your cross, take another. Carry it with you this Lenten Season, as a reminder that Christ wants to be in relationship with you. Christ has invited you into the light, the only true treasure of heaven.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, bring us to your light.
Help us experience your light.
Help us share your light with all your children,
 throughout this Lenten Season,
 and even forevermore.
Amen.