

Pentecost 9 Proper 14 – Year C – Track 2 - 8-11-2019

I spent the last part of this past week in Indiana with my mom and my sister and her family. I had a very striking experience – and it brought me up short. So this is in part confession. My sister Karin and her husband Tracy and their son live in the country now, and she told me they have had a serious problem with mice. That’s not news to anyone who lives in the country, but it has been ... challenging for her. Mice droppings in the laundry room, in the pantry, etc. She said since they have dogs in the house, they don’t use poison. They had tried traditional mouse traps, but the mice kept robbing the trap without getting caught. So Tracy found a metal cage or box trap – which uses glue pads on the bottom of the trap. You put the bait on the glue pads, and the mice get stuck. She said this has been very effective. This entire conversation came up because the second night I was there, I kept hearing noises – so I asked her about the noises the next morning, and she said, “Oh, there must be mice in the trap again.” When I asked her what they do with the mice once they’re stuck on the glue pads, she said she didn’t really know *what* Tracy did with them, but that– good husband that he is – he takes care of them. I told her hearing the mice in the trap still alive but caught was very *unsettling* for me... so she put a box over the trap to lessen the sounds. And they were still there the next day. So when I still heard the little sounds of mice caught in the trap the next night – I did nothing. That is my confession. I did nothing.

And what came to me was a voice that said, “Now you understand how Auschwitz and Dachau happened.”

You may be thinking I’m overdramatizing – but I’m very serious in saying, “That was the insight that came to me.” It was not my house. The mice were not my concern. I had no “position” to be telling my sister what she should be doing about the mice. They were causing her and her family problems, and I had no better solution to offer. So I did nothing. And I understood how *good* people went about their daily business while *other people* – who they had been repeatedly *told* were “OTHER” - were being rounded up, caged, and later gassed. I am sad that it takes this kind of experience to “wake” us – but it is grace that we wake.

I am not trying to compare mice to people. But what I *am* saying is that when we dehumanize others, we “relieve” ourselves of responsibility for what happens to them.

And I believe our Gospel for today speaks to this.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus says to his followers: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. 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.”

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Note the order. Your heart is going to go where you put your treasure – or your heart will follow where you invest your treasure. Several commentators have noted that this phrase is often used as part of stewardship campaigns, telling us that if our hearts are set on God, we should give our treasure to God also! - But that is not what Jesus says. Where your *treasure is*, there your heart will be also.

My “treasure” – as I slept on the couch in my sister’s home – was my relationship with my sister, my desire not to usurp her control over her own household, my desire not to rock the boat too much! But my choice of those things as my treasure meant *I did nothing* about the mice I heard still alive in the cage trap. I hardened my heart to those little noises I heard. I made myself ignore them, so that I could do nothing. What I treasured here were good things, relationships with my sister and her family, but my heart got led somewhere I did not like. I do not want my heart to be unable to hear and respond to cries.

Last week I quoted New Testament Professor Matthew Skinner who said: “Greed compels us to banish anyone who looks like they might threaten ‘what’s ours.’ Likewise, idolatry constructs worldviews in which self-interest is the cardinal virtue.” In the language of today’s gospel, self-interest can become the treasure, hardening our hearts against anyone but ourselves.

Jesus is saying that our treasure and our heart will end up in the same place. But he is telling us that what we treasure takes the lead – and will determine how and where our hearts end up. Last week’s gospel parable of the rich farmer with so big a harvest that he had to tear down his barns and build bigger ones ended with, “So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

In between the verses we heard last Sunday and where today's passage from Luke picks up, Jesus says, "do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30 For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, strive for *his* kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well." And today we are told, "Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." In this entire chapter of Luke's Gospel, Jesus is telling us to watch what we treasure... telling us to treasure the values of the kingdom of God.

We "treasure" many things; we "treasure" our "rights" - to own property, to bear arms, to keep what we have, to preserve our way of life, to preserve a certain culture. But we need to be aware that in making something or some ideology or some way of doing things our *treasure*, we are taking our hearts with us. And we may end up finding that our hearts have changed, become unrecognizable to us. Others in another time and place may look at *us* and say, "How could they let people be treated like that?" or "Why did they do nothing when people kept getting killed?"

Last week I asked, "What are we being greedy about?" and "What are my idols?"

Today's questions are very similar... What is my treasure, really? And where am I letting my heart be led?

As we prayed in the Collect, so let us pray again:

"Grant to us, Lord, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, that we, who cannot exist without you, may by you be enabled to live according to your will, through Christ, our Lord."

Amen.

- [Genesis 15:1-6](#)
[Psalm 33:12-22](#)
[Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16](#)
[Luke 12:32-40](#)