

Sermon – August 7, 2022

“Treasures”

Text: Luke 12: 32-40

Let us pray: May God’s Word, who creates new reality, and the Spirit who breathes life into our world, fill our lives with new possibilities as we live and love and grow and serve. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Two nights ago, I watched a documentary film based on the life story of the Canadian singer and songwriter, Shania Twain on Netflix. I admit I am not really a big fan of the country music genre, but because I was curious about Shania, I watched the film. Born as Eillean Twain from a humble mining town of Timmins, Ontario, Shania was not born with a silver spoon. Money was tight and she experienced violence at home. She was one of the many we could dub “from rags to riches” celebrities.

By 1981, Shania was already writing songs and recording demos. The untimely death of both her mother and stepfather due to a car accident in 1987, was the biggest turning point in her life. At the prime age of 22, she became the parent of her younger siblings and the breadwinner of the family. She signed up doing small gigs in a Canadian resort to support her family. Though she grew up with modest means, Shania surrounded herself with “treasures” that equipped her to achieve her dream in life: to write her own songs and sing them. The treasures include her devotion to her family, her undeniably gift of music, and loads of human values - creativity, resilience, humility, relentlessness and perseverance.

Shania prepared herself while waiting for the big opportunity to come. In 1993, she finally made it to Nashville, securing a contract with Mercury Records. At one point she remarked: “To be relentless was the only way.” Her fame rose worldwide and to this day, she is still sharing her treasure of music with everyone.

Last Sunday, Luke introduced us to the Parable of the Rich Fool who was obsessed with a barn expansion project to store all of his crops. Jesus warns his listeners that holding too much on to material possessions without sharing them with others is a foolish way of living, because

one day, we will die and we cannot bring that material wealth with us. Today's text is a continuation to last week's parable. Only this time, Jesus elaborates the meaning of treasures and priorities and readiness. Luke's social focus is wider than poverty and richness. For Luke, Jesus came to change the basic honour and shame principles of Jewish society, particularly for those who were despised and marginalized. Jesus offered dignity, respect, value, hope and life to those who had maybe never experienced those things before in their lives.

In the opening verse, Jesus urges his followers not to be afraid. "Don't be afraid. You've been given the Kingdom. God has given you life itself." Jesus tells his followers to sell their possessions as if the end of the world is coming; to give alms to the poor and to make purses that never wear out – an unfailing treasure in heaven. I like Eugene Peterson's translation of this verse: *"Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bank robbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."*

How exactly do we make purses that never wear out or a bank that can't go bankrupt? Growing up as a Methodist, I always thought that this kind of purse meant God's record of my good deeds and acts of kindness done, those times when I obeyed the rules, particularly the 10 commandments and those times when I did not swear or when I obeyed my parents without question. You get the picture. But I don't think Jesus describes God as a record-keeper or a bank manager of our deeds or misdeeds. I don't think God is keeping track of how many times we were good or bad. I think this purse that never wears out, according to Nancy Rockwell, *"is not an accumulative good-deed-doing, banked earnings to buy you a ticket to heaven, but a rush of self-forgetting, a joyfully celebrative generosity that empties its purse without worries of a harsh future."*

Could we really live like this? With no fears or worries in life? Why do we buy all sorts of insurance? Why do we take prescribed medication? Why do we receive flu shots and vaccinations? Why do we save for our retirement? Because of our human condition, everything we do stems out of fear and anxiety for the future and the "what ifs" in life. So, what treasure

do you store in your heavenly purse if you have one? What is that treasure, and how do you keep it for the future?

I understand what Jesus is trying to tell us. But it is difficult to follow. If you treasure your possessions, your comfort, your standard of living, your politics, your religion, your hobbies, your privilege, that fall short of God's way of life, of love, of justice and acts of kindness, then your heart will be filled with those unnecessary things that get you sidetracked; those things that keep you away from what is good. I can almost hear Jesus saying something along the lines of, "Focus, everyone! Keep your eyes on the stuff that truly matters in life. Only God's treasures are worth clinging to."

What do you think were the disciples' treasures? Their memories of Jesus were the disciples' treasure. Their treasure was not simply an album of good times, the conversations, the meals shared with Jesus. They also remembered the terrors, the fears, the confusion, the death, their own flight, the suffering. And only with time, have they learned how to transform that pain into a lasting treasure. Their treasure was the memory of Jesus, which they had been privileged to witness and told the tales of this with their own presence as part of the story.

If you ask me what my treasures are, let me share with you some of them:

Being part of a loving family that supports and loves me.

Being able to sing and play guitar and listen to music.

Being able to read my favourite books, watch movies and shows and share a wonderful conversation with others.

Enjoying a nature walk.

Being part of this faith community, welcomed at tables by dear friends, who are willing to listen to and pray with me.

The treasure that overflows in my purse is not a list of achievements, but the many ways in which I have been able to witness love, grace, and the presence of God at work in my life.

So what are your treasures? How are you building your own purse that will never wear out?

How are you getting ready?

When Jesus declares "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," he says that

we can train our wills and our ways of thinking through the myriad ways we use our time, our talents and our treasures. I like what author Gary Anderson says in this passage: “Spend it all on yourself, guess where your heart will go. Give it to those in need, your heart will go where God wants it to go. Moreover, your heart will find God in the process. For there is a sacramental aspect to charity, in which God becomes present to givers through those who receive and need their gifts.”

Friends, don't wait for tomorrow to use and share those treasures you have. Make today an opportune time to build relationships. Today, stop being anxious about what tomorrow may hold. Today, choose to enjoy a good conversation with a friend. Today, hug your children and enjoy their laughter. Today, take a nature walk and relish the beauty of God's creation. Today, read a book of poetry and memorize a line or two that makes you celebrate the goodness of life. Today, enjoy a meal with the people you care about. Today, count your blessings and say a prayer of thanksgiving. Today, let those treasures take you where your heart is. God is here. Now. This time. Amen.

Sources:

Nancy Rockwell, “Treasures in Heaven”, A Bite in the Apple

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Rev. Brett Younger – day1.org

Documentary Film of Shania Twain on Netflix

Gary A. Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).