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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

August 10, 2025

Year C, Proper 14, Revised Common Lectionary

Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm 33:12-22

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

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I remember reading an interview with a former managing director at Lehman Brothers, the huge investment firm that collapsed during the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis.

I was sitting in my office one afternoon and complaining to no one in particular about having to go on the road yet again. The guy at the desk next to me said, "Yeah, I've got to fly across the country myself, and I'm gonna miss my daughter's first birthday." Now, this guy had been at the firm for twenty years, and he was worth at least fifty million dollars. So I said to him, "Why do you still do it?" He looked at me like I was some kind of idiot for even asking the question. "Well, for the money, of course," he said.[1]

[1] Tony Schwartz, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 241.

I once had a bishop who said he could tell what someone really believes by looking at two things: their calendar, and their checkbook. Our time and our possessions are two of the most basic resources we put towards what we really value. And how we spend our time and how we spend our money are visible, tangible manifestations of the convictions we hold in our hearts about what's most important and what's most real—whether we'd be able to verbalize those convictions to ourselves or others, or not.

Today we heard Jesus say that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. And it's fascinating to me that he doesn't say it the other way around. We might expect him to say "Where your heart is, your treasure will be also." But he puts it in the opposite order: "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also." It's as if to suggest that as human beings, we aren't necessarily rational deciders who start with our values and then express them through our choices. Instead, probably at least as often, our choices shape us. The vocations we choose, the friendships and relationships we enter into, the politicians we vote for, the media we read or listen to or watch, and certainly not least of all the ways we spend our money and our time and our effort—we make these choices out of our values, but often our values also shift over time to be compatible with the choices we've already made.

Take this guy from Lehman Brothers. What are the convictions expressed by his lifestyle? Perhaps "Money is the most important thing." Or perhaps "The world is a dangerous and unfriendly place, so you'd better stave off disaster or poverty, because it lurks around every corner."

But if we asked him, I suspect he wouldn't say those are his deepest beliefs. And I'm all but certain they weren't the beliefs that got him into his vocation in the first place. He might talk about his daughter and his family, perhaps providing for them, perhaps even doing satisfying and meaningful work. But the way he lives his life suggests a different attitude toward reality is taking over. He's in danger of losing his heart. He's put his treasure—his money, his time—into certain choices and those choices have become his values.

That process can happen in the other direction too. James Doty was a Stanford neurosurgeon and an entrepreneur who'd made a $75 million fortune by investing in biotechnology. He'd emerged from a childhood in poverty, and he lived a big life, driving a Ferrari and buying a private island. But he also decided to pledge $30 million of that fortune to a charitable trust for education and global health. Then the market tanked and his net worth tumbled to precisely $30 million. Faced with the choice to honor his pledge or take it back, he honored it and gave away his last $30 million. He would later say it was the best thing he ever did. "[It] released me from that monkey [on my back]," he said. It ended the emptiness he felt of trying to compare himself with others and prove his worth through money. He ended up leaving Stanford and moving to Mississippi to start a much-needed regional neurosurgery center. Later he would return to Stanford to become the founder of a center for studying altruism and compassion. Now James Doty is an atheist. He didn't do what he did out of an explicit faith commitment. He'll tell you he did it out of a kind of selfishness, because it felt good and gave him a sense of meaning and purpose. But his story is a great illustration of the principle of our gospel today: where we put our resources ends up shaping the people we become.

Today we also heard a reading from the Letter to the Hebrews that's all about faith in what is invisible and its manifestation in our visible choices. Abraham and Sarah made the choice to strike out from their safe homeland into a foreign country to live as nomads. It was a choice that made no sense except for their conviction that God was calling them. And we too, if we put our faith at the center of our lives, may find ourselves making choices that look different from what the world around us thinks makes sense.

On Good Friday we read the story of Jesus' crucifixion from the Gospel of John, with the scene of Jesus standing on trial before Pontius Pilate. Pilate sits on his judgment seat, in his robes of state. He represents the whole might of the Roman empire: power, military strength, money, success, order. And then there is Jesus, the peasant from a little village in Galilee, bound, mocked, about to be executed. From a worldly perspective—from the perspective of the bottom line—it looks a lot more promising for Pilate. To see the glory of God instead in Jesus takes the eyes of faith.

As Christians we believe the God of love revealed in Jesus is the truest truth there is. Our call is to live outward lives that show that invisible truth and make it visible out there in this world. May we manifest the glory of God in weakness and foolishness and boldness and love, in the choices we make with our money and our time and our energy, that we may be living icons of the Holy One, today and all our lives.