

**Sunday, November 9, 2014**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

Today's New Testament reading comes from an earlier chapter in Matthew's gospel.

I chose this passage from the sixth chapter because it speaks to our lives today in the church.

The lessons conveyed in this chapter are part of one of five major discourses, or sermons in the book.

This passage is preceded by the Sermon on the Mount which includes the beatitudes.

Jesus is plainly speaking to the assembled crowds providing guidance for their everyday lives.

The reading was from the gospel of Matthew 6:19-34.

### **Sermon – “Where Your Heart Is”**

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*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

This single statement by Jesus is truly a sermon all in itself. It often provides the basis for a stewardship sermon laying the groundwork for making a case for sharing your resources with the church.

I originally chose this passage so that I could talk to you about our annual appeal.

I planned to guide you, ever so gently, through the process of assessing what might be stored in your proverbial barns with the hope that you would consider sharing some of that bounty with the church.

I wanted to highlight the incredible generosity of one of our members who offered to match any pledge increases up to \$25,000 this year.

I was going to remind you that we need a commitment from each and every one of you to build the body of Christ on earth.

I intended to use this familiar lesson from Jesus to prompt you into being joyful givers.

That was my plan.

Then, after a particularly challenging day, I went for a walk.

On my walk I was reflecting on this passage and picturing the barns that people erect in their lives to store up what is important to them.

My mind began to wander and the picture that began to develop was one of heaven.

I began to see heaven as the place where we come face to face with what we have identified as our treasure.

I pictured people sitting in barns of their own design surrounded by the things they had identified as important in life.

The man who had prioritized money as his treasure was sitting in the middle of a barn surrounded by stacks of money.

The woman who had put herself first in all things, worrying about her appearance and what other people thought of her was in a barn with nothing but mirrors.

The person who had advocated for legalistic adherence to rules was in a barn surrounded by law books.

The person who was intent on total control sat in a barn, alone, with a giant control panel – lots of switches and levers.

The person whose life was empty – sat alone in an empty barn.

The person who had embraced the idea that love is the most important of all life's gifts was in a barn surrounded by all the people he had ever loved.

The person who had a deep faith and a pure heart was in a barn with God.

We choose our heaven.

We don't talk a lot about heaven or hell for that matter, but conceptually, they are important to our mortal lives.

If there is no reconciling with God; if there is no judgment day – then why do we work so hard at getting things right?

What is the motivation for living up to God's expectations of us if it is not a heavenly reward?

But if heaven reflects the choices we make while we live on earth then we are choosing our own heaven or hell each day when we make decisions of how to live.

Once this theory started to percolate in my mind I began to see examples of it everywhere.

The addict who is tormented by his need for heroin is locked into a hellish existence that feels eternal and cannot notice the change of seasons.

The terrorist wed to a life of violence misses the opportunity to see the beauty in his neighbor's eye.

The blindly ambitious worker forgets to watch his child grow.

The bigot loses his beloved daughter when she falls in love with a foreign man.

We choose our heaven.

One of the interesting experiences I have had is presiding at memorial services for families who have no faith.

It's not that their grief for their loved one is any more severe than others.

It is that death, for a person without faith, is more final.

There is no heavenly banquet, no eternal life of peace, no promise of being in the presence of God.

Faith is said to be a gift of grace from God.

When that gift is bestowed, it must be received.

Faith is a choice.

When we make that choice, we are freed of worry – we exchange the need for control with the need to trust.

Jesus, speaking almost two thousand years ago might as well have been giving a *Ted* talk to stressed out executives last week.

*Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.*

What purpose is served...how much energy do you waste worrying about things over which you have no control?

What are you trying to cram into your barn?

Wealth? Health? Prestige? Power? Control?

Worry and anxiety really create their own type of hell.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that you can replace that anxiety with trust and gratitude.

Jesus tells us that we can trust, just as the birds and the flowers do, that whatever we need will come to us.

Fill your heart and your mind with faith, and with gratitude for the blessings in your life.

One author commented "By adopting gratitude, we can discover God's abundance. When gratitude replaces anxiety, even when we find we have less than we had during our worry days, gratitude reveals that we have far more than we need."

The Serenity Prayer, written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and adopted by Alcoholics

Anonymous, puts this into perspective for us:

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Do you know the difference between those things you cannot change and the things you can?

This takes me back to the stewardship sermon.

You have an opportunity to contribute to the well being of the church.

Your annual pledge has the power to change lives through the good work of the church.

You are invited to fill your barn with generosity, with kindness, with gratitude and with joy.

I promise you that if you put worry and anxiety aside as one of the things that you can change, you will be transformed.

If you not only put worry and anxiety aside, but replace it with generosity and joy, you will greatly enhance the possibility of spending eternity in the presence of God.