

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
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The Way of Passion?
Look Under “Champion” in the Dictionary – Definition #3
Luke 12.32-34
September 2, 2007
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Definition #1 of Champion: “One that wins first place or first prize in a competition.” – Doesn’t sound very much like Jesus to me. Definition #2 of Champion: “One that is clearly superior or has the attributes of a winner.” Clearly not a Jesus notion. I believe Jesus spoke in “first shall be last/last shall be first” language. Ah, but Definition #3 is one I think we can live with: “An ardent defender or supporter of a cause or another person.” This is beginning to sound more like the Way of Passion to me. We will be spending the bulk of the fall looking at the different paths in following Jesus as we follow Luke’s version of the Jesus story. The early faithful were known as Followers of the Way. Last week we began with the Way of Generosity. This week we take a look at the Way of Passion.

The verse from Luke – *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* – is usually associated with issues of money, possessions, and materialism. And that would be a correct interpretation. Jesus deals with issues related to greed just before this treasure/heart verse. A parable related to our obsession with possessions comes right before this verse. We even get a healthy dose of the famous “Do Not Worry” speech from Jesus: *Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, and what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing . . . instead strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.* (verses 22-31) Then Jesus says in our text today: *sell your possessions and give alms.* Almsgiving was “voluntary acts of mercy or charity, designed to meet the needs of the poor.” (Mercer Dictionary of the Bible) Then he lays the *where your*

treasure is, there your heart will be also on us. It is accurate that this verse be associated with money and the guilt that may have been placed on us concerning our materialism. It's a sermon that begs to be preached – over and over and over again – especially when a church is behind in the budget – which is where almost every church I know is ALL the time!

We could – all of us – give more. We SHOULD – all of us – give more. We ought not be so caught up in the pursuit of more stuff. We need to examine ourselves closely – is money – the having of it or the wanting more of it – ruling our lives. *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. But as much as I'd love to preach that sermon, which would be more accurate to the literal context of this verse, I think there is a bigger picture here. This treasure and heart connection is about more than money. It's about our passions and our drives. It's about asking ourselves – in a moment of clear honesty – what are my most valued treasures – knowing full well that that is precisely where our hearts are. And after we discover what our real treasures are, we need to ask ourselves – in another moment of clear honesty – are these Kingdom of God treasures? Do the things that I value and treasure most meet with the standards of all that Jesus held to be important? Do the things that I value and treasure comply with my understanding of who God is and what God wants for me and for the world? Or do I separate what I profess in here, from how I live out there?

Do you hear that I have asked all of these questions in the first person? For my job in confronting this text, and any text, is to find how it interfaces with my life, not to see how much guilt I can lay on you. In the sermon, you get to eavesdrop on my own wrestling in the hope that as I interact with the text you catch a glimpse of something that will make a difference in your own Gospel living. Someone has said that all preachers really preach to themselves.

Why does Jesus say “*where your treasure is there your heart will be also,*” and not the other way around? Because if our heart is with our treasure, couldn’t he have said, “Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also”? Jesus was trying to tell us something about our hearts: that as important as they are... they are gullible, easily seduced, fickle. Yes, our hearts will be where our treasure is – because what we treasure is what so often leads us. The “heart,” in the Hebrew understanding was the seat of the will (more like what we think of when we say “head” [the stomach or bowels were the seat of the emotions (what we usually think of as our “heart”)]). Jesus is reminding us of temptation... our hearts (meaning our wills), are easily led astray by things, literal “treasures” on earth. So we, as a whole, are easily influenced by things...

Jesus is reminding us... our hearts need to find their passion – within. In the passion God created within us. Not in the things which so easily lead us astray... The way of passion begins, not with locating a treasure that is worthwhile... but finding the passion that is within our hearts...

So the question before us today is: How do you find your own heart? What is your treasure? What is your passion? Jesus has spoken the obvious – wherever our treasure is, there our heart will be also. I do hate a three point sermon (with passion – boring!), but here is one. I see three obvious categories here:

- 1) folks who really don’t have any passion – I’m talking about Kingdom passion
- 2) folks who speak of their passions, but you’d never know it by the way they live
- 3) folks who have passion and live the Way of Passion

It’s difficult for me to imagine, but there are some people who don’t seem to have passion (and keep in mind, I am talking about Kingdom passion – the kind of passion that comes

from that which is sacred and holy and of God – I’m talking about the Way of Passion as one of the paths in following Jesus) – and some folks just don’t have it. They are stuck in a rut – grinding out the daily routine of life – not thinking very much beyond themselves. Nothing lights the fire of their soul. They may be fun-loving, successful, far from boring people, but nothing really sparks a flame in their heart. I am sad for those folks, for it seems they are missing a real depth to life. There is a fullness that is missing and their striving for happiness is the only passion they can muster and that, in and of itself, will never be enough. *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

That second group consists of folks who know about passion, talk about passion, believe in passion, but they do not live as if there is a passion that burns in their soul. In other words, if they didn’t speak about their passions, others may never know what they treasured. The old adage – actions speak louder words comes into play here. Our treasure is more than money and it’s more than words. Paying lip service to our passions is great – but if you can’t tell by the way I live, then my heart hasn’t caught up to my lips. I fear I fall into this category the most. I don’t think I am alone. I feel much passion around education, and not only the right of all children to receive a quality education, but that it actually happen, but what am I doing about it other than making sure my own children are receiving the best? What about all the other children who do not have the same advantages as my children? I feel passion around the issue of affordable housing in Mecklenburg County, but what do I ever do about it other than mention it in a few sermons every year and work on a Habitat House or two? I feel much passion around environmental issues and the discipline of simplicity in our living, but I am confident that you can’t tell that these are passions of mine by the way I live. So are they really passions if I am not living like affordable housing for all people is my treasure and that is where my heart is as well?

Is the environment really my passion while I drive gas guzzling vehicles? *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

And then there's the third category – folks who really live the Way of Passion. They really live it – in what they say and how they go about life. That definition #3 of “Champion” is one I think we can live with: “An ardent defender or supporter of a cause or another person.” I'm glad that we have chosen to name folks “Champions” in our church in the way we go about doing missions in this place. There are some among us who have said, “I have a passion for knitting,” and lo and behold, they are churning out prayer shawls and premie baby hats and toboggans for the homeless folks that come our way through Room in the Inn. Their treasure can be found in knitting needles and yarn and their hearts have followed along spending hours creating and praying and offering comfort to those in need. There are some among us who have said, “I have a passion for families who are homeless,” and lo and behold, they have signed us all up for Thanksgiving week to host our next Family Promise group and the very first day that is already filled up . . . is Thanksgiving Day! Their treasure will be found in turkey and dressing and sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce and their hearts will follow along to serve the food and dine with our guests. There are some among us who have said, “I have a passion for our friends in Cuba,” and lo and behold, ten people from among us will go this November to take them our love . . . and yes, a little money too. And I could go on and on, because there are some people who have passion, and speak about their passion, and then they go and live the Way of Passion – and they make all the difference. To those we say, *“Well done, good and faithful servants.”*

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Followers of Jesus should be the freest persons – free from anxiety, free from the social conventions of materialism, free with their generosity to others. The lives of Jesus’ disciples count for more than the pursuit of material wealth. They are devoted to higher things . . . What changes would we make if we were as concerned about God’s kingdom as we are about the size of next month’s paycheck, the next harvest, or the next step up the career ladder? What value would we give to reconciling broken relationships, sharing the gospel of God’s love, and working for peace and justice for the oppressed?” (New Interpreter’s, Volume IX, R. Alan Culpepper, page 261)

It was Frederick Buechner that said it best: "The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." If we are to be known as Followers of the Way, we will need to travel the Way of Passion. May it be so.