

Sermon Text for May 21, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 51, Matthew 6:16-21

“The location of our heart”

It has been quite an emotional few days during the week for the Bronkema family. Our oldest daughter, Rachel, has now completely finished all of her schooling and as she is about to turn 27 is looking forward to her next step in her journey. Bethany flew back from Iceland to surprise Rachel and Naomi drove down from Boston, they are both still a couple more years out from ending their schooling, with Bethany maybe having another run for a handful of years after that. It brought Stacy and me back to those days when every single waking moment, it seemed, our hearts were focused on ensuring our kids had what they need and were positioned well to succeed in their next steps.

They're doing that now on their own but our actions were definitely dictated by what was important to us, which was making sure those girls were in a position to be able to realize all that they could accomplish. The keynote speaker at the graduation was great and she reminded me of why Rachel chose to go to NYU for law school. She emphasized how it is the intent of NYU to produce lawyers whose hearts are focused on the good of society and the well being of everyone in that society. It was not to ensure profitability or to find ways to get people wealthier, but rather what we would call in the church, to pursue righteousness, acting according to the will of God which meant in that context, acting so that all people have a fair shake at opportunity.

For many people, however, the drive and their hearts are set not just to set up their children in a position to succeed, not just to provide, but to have as much as we can amass materially as possible. I have always been a bit embarrassed going into grocery stores and seeing the 48 different choices for cereal, or walk in my closet and see my drawers stuffed with clothes and wonder if I really need that many clothes. There is an underlying drive in most of us in Western culture to pursue money and wealth so that we can have nice things. But the cost of this drive forces our hearts to be in a place where we pursue having as much as we can to ensure that our family doesn't go without.

I am living in a much higher income bracket than my parents ever did. They never owned a home in their life. We never had more than one car in our family growing up, with four boys that could prove to be challenging. They never had real savings or investments to fall back on. As a child I knew what they were pursuing in life and I knew where their hearts were, what was important to them. So I grew up wanting to pursue the same thing. They were happy, we

were happy. I like being happy. And there was something in our lives outside of the nuclear family that was very important after which to pursue, and this was key.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of the human species is its proclivity, its tendency to collect things. Humans tend to collect treasure and assign status to one another on the basis of what has been collected. These verses that we are reading, especially our Matthew verse, challenges the equation of a person's worth based upon their acquisitions. When you value what you own, then your heart is pretty empty. When you value how your relationship with others and God are then your heart can be full and no one can take that away from you, not moth or rust. Let's read.

READ

Both of our readings for this morning square themselves nicely within our sermon series on the Gospel of righteousness. They both point us to a recognition that what is ultimately important to us is going to be reflected in our actions. Our heart is seen as the focus, our decision maker, and this heart of ours controls our actions. Children have a way of seeing through their parents words. Parents have a way of demonstrating where their hearts lie even while saying something completely different. We may say that we want to be a Matthew 25 community but individually our hearts and collectively our time may not be spent in a way to provide as much relief as possible to those struggling within our community.

Our first reading David emphasizes the change that he wants to have take place in his heart. Remember the context of this Psalm, look at the very beginning of Psalm 51. I had us read all of it because it is a Psalm written right after Nathan approaches him and call him out after he raped Bathsheeba. Three times David prays that his heart would experience a transformation because he knew that if his heart didn't change then his actions would never change. You can't just will yourself to do the right thing if your heart is set on pursuing that which is not of God and only of benefit to yourself.

Vs. 6, teach me wisdom in my secret heart, vs.10 create in me a clean heart, vs.17, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Change me God, and the only way that you are going to change me is if you change my heart. My actions are clearly telling the world that my heart is not righteous, is not pursuing your will.

Jesus in Matthew is trying to move his disciples away from this engrained human tendency to collect things and instead to identify what is their greatest treasure, what is most important in the world to them and this would be seen in their actions, which would belie what was on their hearts.

He begins with fasting which seems a bit out of place in what we are looking at today, but it also speaks to what is on the heart. If you are fasting, or praying, or going to church, or doing anything that you think is spiritual and religious but you are doing it for the sake of others seeing how religious and spiritual you are, then your heart is in the wrong place and it is going to be of no eternal benefit for you. If you are baptizing your child because you want others to see how religious you are, then you are missing the point. Our hearts need to be in a place where God takes center stage and from that everything else emanates. Today in our baptisms we glorify and recognize that the kingdom of God has come among us and it is our job to act accordingly.

When Jesus speaks about fasting he is saying that God knows our hearts and our actions, public or private fasting, will dictate where our hearts truly are. If we want to be seen by people then we really don't care about God in our fasting. Our treasure is in how people view us, and not how God views us. The idea in Matthew today is that your goal, or what you consider important will determine the course of your activity and your commitment. What drives your heart will drive your actions.

The heart has been the source of much content in poetry and literature. In Shakespeare's Othello you have the main character say: "But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at." This is where we get the term wearing your heart on your sleeve which means that you have a really hard time hiding your intentions and your emotions and what you are about to do next. In Deuteronomy 6:5 we read "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." Jesus repeats this phrase in Matthew 22 as the first part of the greatest commandment.

The heart will pursue that which we consider to be the most important part of our life. It can pursue God if our desire is to pursue God. That is why David beseeched God to change his heart because he knew that this was not where his heart lay. He did not want to pursue God, he wanted to pursue his own interests, but he was convicted of it. The Gospel of Righteousness as a whole, Matthew as a whole, defines one of the greatest threats to righteousness as the pursuit of wealth. What we have on this earth is insecure, unstable, can be taken from us in a moment's notice.

Stacy and I have been working with refugees our whole life, from the time we were in ministry in Italy together to today with both CWS and LS school district. Some of these refugees are professionals, doctors and engineers who because they were in the wrong political party had

to flee from their home and all they had, literally was taken from them. Our treasure on earth is very, very short lived, and for some of us, even shorter lived than we would want.

As far as what we are doing here and what we do in our homes, wealth is the most conspicuous example of that which can distract from pure discipleship. Only the strongest among us can possess wealth and not be enslaved to it. I Timothy 6:8-10, Hebrews 13:5 A unique feature of a disciples of Jesus Christ is their ability to prioritize righteousness vs. materialism. The believer's attitude toward money is another illustration of the righteousness that exceeds demanded by Jesus of his followers.

Here is a good measure of where your heart is as a follower of Jesus, if you are curious how you are doing in this field. If you are content with what you have, then you are in a good place, look at Philippians 4:11-13 – "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Today I want you to leave asking yourself the question of where your heart is, and if you are having a hard time identifying the location of your heart, you simply need to look at your actions. May they reflect a righteousness that exceeds. Amen.