

Where your treasure is

A sermon preached by Revd Prof Rob Gilbert on Ash Wednesday 2016.

Bible reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Jesus said: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

It needed saying, even though in a sense it's a tautology; even though it's kind of circular. If you really treasure something then you have – as we say – given your heart to it. It's St Valentine's Day on Sunday – many people will be looking for ways to say: you are my treasure and I give you my heart.

But also, where your heart is tells you what you really treasure: the people or things or activities you really love, they are the things that make you rich. It reminds us of another phrase of Jesus': by their fruits you will know them. We might say of someone: “Oh, she put her heart into it” – we mean she gave everything she could, she treasured what she was doing.

Given that it is only a very short time since the end of the Christmas season and we are already starting Lent today, it is quite easy for us to think back to some of the key moments and characters in our Christmas stories and to ask where their treasure was, where their heart was.

Where was Mary's treasure? He was her baby son – a treasure she carried to Bethlehem and bore in a stable and then presented proudly in the temple, a firstborn dedicated to the Lord.

Where was Joseph's treasure? This child Jesus, again, but as a carpenter maybe especially treasuring the thought that he would get to bring the lad up, showing him how to use tools and work wood.

Where was the treasure of the Wise Men? Well, not in their hands – their heart wasn't in luxury and safety and wealth. Instead, they put their heart into travelling from far away to bear witness to a king for the whole world. They showed where their treasure was by handing over what other people might *think* was their treasure, because their treasure was what the baby in the manger meant for them.

Simeon and Anna in the temple were waiting for their treasure to come to them – and in a way, while Jesus did come *their* treasure was the prayerfulness and devotion and patience they had, which kept them waiting, expectantly, long after others would have given up. That was a real gift, a real treasure for them.

You notice that for all these people their treasure is not something they keep for themselves. It's someone they care for – and he grows in strength and wisdom and independence. It's someone they train – and he takes his own place in the carpenter's shop and then on the road with his disciples. It's someone they come to bear witness to – the

light of the world, a saviour for all people. And it's what enabled them to keep on waiting, patiently, in the belief that God would answer their prayers.

Where is our treasure? What do we put our heart into? I think these are appropriate questions for Lent as we seek to locate where our treasure is and to refocus our priorities.

Where is our treasure? Looking around, it's in each other, that's for sure. We are a treasure to each other and we should put our heart into our relationships with one another – in our church community and in the wider community too.

Our treasure is in our church building too. Cared for, renovated, a resource for us and for our neighbours.

If we work or volunteer our treasure I hope would be there too – we put our heart into our work when we treasure it, and that means we give all we can to it.

But we can misplace our treasure. We can put it in the wrong place – and we can treasure the wrong thing. We can forget where we put our treasure – put it somewhere so safe that we can't remember quite where that was. And we can lose our treasure – maybe for good: we can have it taken from us, or neglect to care for it.

Which is maybe why Jesus tells us to care for the treasures that *cannot* – just *cannot* – be taken away, that can't be eaten by moths or taken by thieves. If there's one thing it's good to do at Lent it's to think of the treasures that we cannot lose. Our love for others, their love for us; the things we have done which make us glad; the things we can do now; above all, God's love for us which we can never lose. We should count our blessings – remember them actively, remind ourselves of them. Because if we don't know where our treasure is then how can we take care of it?

It's good at Lent for us to count our blessings – I mean, name our treasures: the things and people we love. Maybe it's good to give things up for Lent as a discipline; maybe it's good to take new things on, reading or praying more or joining in with something new. But I want to suggest it is also good to count our blessings, or in other words to identify where our treasures are and give thanks for them.

Amen.