

First Church of Squantum

Trusting God

Luke 16: 9-15

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Michael S. Robertson

Last week I spoke about the importance of measuring results as opposed to measuring activity and Jesus' clear advice concerning good intentions without the appropriate follow through. I also asked if you thought the words, **In God we Trust**, that is printed on our currency had become outdated and therefore somewhat meaningless. In the scripture reading we are told by Jesus that it is impossible to serve two masters and he uses God and money as his references. In this case I believe money is meant to include many things we all desire that we purchase with money. The challenge Jesus presents in this passage is a clear separation between what the world values and what Jesus tells us God values.

What are we to do with the worldly wealth we have been given? Jesus says we are to use worldly wealth to gain friends and by this I believe he is telling us we are to be as generous as possible. He also says that we are to be trustworthy in the way we handle our worldly possessions. According to Jesus it does not really matter how much we have since he says that if we can be trusted with very little then we can also be trusted with much more. Note how many times the word trust is used in this passage. It is quite obvious that trust is important in God's sight. Now the message this morning is not at all concerned with what any of us might give to this church, rather it is focused on where God exists in your daily decision making. We have talked quite a lot about what is involved in putting our trust in a God we can not see. Our worldly possessions, including money in the bank, does make us feel more secure, but is this merely an illusion? We can all observe those who have more money and more possessions than they can ever use who clearly are unhappy. Some resort to mind altering drugs and even take their own lives because they discover that their lives are empty. The fame and success they thought would enable them to live complete and fulfilled lives proved to be a myth. Let's face it, they were sold a bill of goods and they fell for it.

Jesus tells us exactly what we must do to live properly and it has very little to do with how much we might have. You have heard the saying, "The person who dies with the most toys wins." My first encounter with great wealth came during the summer I taught sailing at the Bar Harbor Yacht Club in Maine. The class consisted of about 25 children from very different backgrounds. Two incidents are instructive. The first involved the son of the Rear Commodore who believed that because of that he did not have to follow my instructions. His father was also the owner and treasurer of a very large national corporation. I sent him home and told him he could not return to the class until he brought me a note from his mother. One of the other officers of the club contacted me to see if I was serious and perhaps there was another way of dealing with this matter. I said not if they wanted me to continue as the sailing instructor. I did receive the note, he returned to the class, behaved and actually learned how to sail properly.

The other incident concerned a girl whose parents had inherited a great fortune from an ancestor who founded one of America's most famous companies. We expanded the fleet and challenged another yacht club to a team race. Four boats from each club would compete with a skipper and crew in each boat. I picked the team based on demonstrated ability and so the team was comprised of 8 children, four skippers and four crew members. The girl was designated as one of the crew and she was thrilled to be included. However, when she told her mother that she was part of the team as a crew her mother said that because they owned one of the boats, she could not compete unless she was a skipper. She came to me in tears and I personally spoke to her mother but to no avail. She was allowed to continue in the sailing class and truly enjoyed it. Years later she had a coming out party in New York with Louis Armstrong performing as the back up band to the Meyer Davis orchestra. Incidentally, we easily defeated the other club and were not able to schedule any more team races.

How did great wealth and position help these two children? Too often we believe that what keeps us from achieving our dreams' desires is the lack of money or perhaps the lack of opportunity. This week Clara, Tom and I conducted worship services at the Marina Bay Nursing Home and at the Atria in Marina Bay. I gave basically the same message I delivered here a few weeks ago regarding a Stumbling Block or a Stepping Stone. The examples of how two individuals refused to allow their physical disabilities to shatter their dreams of a productive life give an impact to that message. Remember the young man who lost the use of his legs through a hunting accident and George, who contracted childhood polio at the age of three. We all have within us the power to achieve almost anything if we are willing to do what it takes. I have for a long time believed that anyone is only two years removed from achieving a stated goal. By this I mean that if you decide you want something bad enough that you can be well along the path to attaining that goal within two years.

The question we all must ask and answer is why do you desire to achieve a particular goal? What is it you are hoping to achieve? Who is it that you are hoping to impress? In this morning's scripture passage we are told that the Pharisees loved money and wanted to justify themselves in the eyes of people. This seeking of worldly fame is a theme Jesus refers to often because he regards this as one of the many temptations that can separate us from God. In many of our hymns we actually refer to Jesus as a King in a worldly sense. Many past and present religious ceremonies are quite elaborate, not at all reflective of the way Jesus dressed and lived. But I believe the central theme this morning is all about trust and the command we are given to demonstrate that we are trustworthy in God's eyes over whatever we have been given. So we are back to determining how to measure what we are doing with the blessings we have been given, individually as well as a church community.

Trusting God is one of the most difficult tasks we face because we are never going to actually see a physical God, we either believe or we do not. This may be exactly what Jesus means when he says it only takes a little bit of faith to move a mountain. I find this statement to be very comforting because events happen in our lives that cause all of us to have doubts. Fortunately we are never told that we must have some defined amount of

faith, a little bit of faith will do. What stories do we need to hear that will stay with us and lift us up when we are experiencing doubt? There are the Old Testament stories that include David fighting Goliath, Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt, Jonah in the great fish, the three young men in the fiery furnace and Moses leading the people out of Egypt. These are all stories that emphasize the power of faith. But they are old stories that may not cause you or me to take them seriously or to believe they apply to our daily living right now. More contemporary stories of strong faith might include Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Helen Keller, Gandie, Mandela, the Pilgrims or some story of faith you have heard about still may not make a life changing impression.

That is the dilemma you and I face when we place our trust in God. We need an example we can easily relate to and I believe that this can come from the support we give each other here at First Church. The individual acts of kindness we observe and engage in on a daily basis will over time help our level of trust grow. When we are able to share these acts of kindness without feeling self conscious I believe we will begin to experience spiritual growth. The result we are seeking is not to become famous but rather to become trustworthy in God's eyes. Placing our trust in God is perhaps the most freeing thing we can do and where better to place our trust. Every day we are told about famous, successful and wealthy people who become so discouraged with daily life that they will actually hurt themselves. They placed their trust in worldly success and found it to be wanting. It was not what they had expected and this disillusionment destroyed their love of life. We are told how many entertainment stars like Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and John Balluchi discovered that no matter how much fame they may have attained it did not lead to happiness.

But telling and elaborating on negative stories will also not help anyone believe because we honestly believe we can handle success better than they did. This also applies to the winners of those huge lottery prizes who discover that their lives fall apart as the result of their winning a large amount of money. The scripture talks about our need to handle a small amount in a generous and trustworthy manner rather than believing we must wait until we have a large amount. People will often say, "What difference will my small contribution make?" The answer, according to Jesus, is that it makes all the difference both in this world and in the next. We have all been entrusted with different blessings and we are told that we are to share our blessings no matter how insignificant we may believe they are. A feeling of false modesty may be the big hurdle that is holding you back from achieving a level of trust. Perhaps something happened that has caused you to believe you are unworthy of God's love. Let me tell you this morning that nothing could be further from the truth.

However, like the prodigal son who went off into the world and squandered his many blessings, when we find ourselves lost we have to repent and return. God will not chase after us but God will also not stop loving us. Like the father in the story who waited patiently for his son to return, God will welcome all who trust the teachings of Jesus. As we observe the expansion of laws that are meant to regulate our personal behavior we have to ask ourselves where is this leading? Do our elected officials actually believe that passing another law that will change personal behavior? Throughout history this has been

attempted by many nations and none have succeeded. The Romans passed laws to prevent inflation and achieved no success even with the penalty of death to anyone who raised their prices. No matter how hard we might try there is only one sure way to a happy and fulfilled life and that is by placing your trust in God. Not out of fear or for any tangible reward but because you believe you are actually loved. Just think for a moment what this means, to be loved by God. To be singled out personally and entrusted to do here on earth what God wants you to do. No fear that you are inadequate to the task because you have God's love and support. Jesus tells us that we can be happy while we are living by consciously serving others, particularly by being generous to those who may not have received the blessings we have received. Jesus tells us we are not to worry but rather we are to put our faith in a God who loves us.

Let us pray. God, we pray this morning for the ability to place our trust in a God who loves us. A God, who is not some remote unknown being, but rather a trusting God who knows our every fault and loves us anyway. This is the promise Jesus proclaimed to all those who believe in you. We thank you this morning for the Good News of your love. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN