

## Will We Invest In One Another?

Fellow bearers of the image of God – the imprint of Love, I invite us to wonder together this morning: will we invest in one another? God’s love draws us together on this Harvest Fest weekend and Stewardship Sunday. We are gathered via livestream and in our house of worship on this land which First Nations peoples and others have loved long before us and which we hope others will cherish into the future. As we move into this time of reflection, let’s first pause to pray.

Holy generously loving Spirit, we invite you to help us see how we can, do, and will invest in one another – in those right beside us at church, home, work and school... and in wider and wider circles of community. Center our hearts and our minds in your powerful peace. Amen.

Fellow followers of Jesus, in today’s gospel readings, Jesus challenges us to take a clear-eyed look at our investments. Jesus wonders, in what are we investing ourselves. We daily invest ourselves in many relationships and endeavors – through both conscious decisions and well-worn habits. **To invest is to commit or to engage in order to experience a return.** We invest our energy, time, skill, money, heart. Toward what returns are we aiming?

We hear this challenge from Jesus today: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”* We know how to store up for ourselves on Earth the kind of physical, destructible treasures Jesus refers to. But what does it look like to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven? In order to begin to respond to that question, we need to know what heaven is. In a moment, we will offer any responses we care to share aloud.

I have often shared with you my favorite scripture verse – Luke 17:21. Luke tells of a conversational moment between Jesus and a pharisaic teacher of Torah:

*“The Pharisees asked Jesus when the reign of God would come.*

*Jesus replied, ‘The reign of God doesn’t come in a visible way. You can’t say, “See, here it is!” or “There it is!” No—look: the reign of God is already in your midst.’*

Many rabbinical and biblical scholars have written about the concepts and realities of both heaven and the reign of God. They are neither synonymous nor distant relatives to one another. Throughout the Christian tradition, today is lifted up as Reign of Christ Sunday or Christ the King Sunday. It is often a day of celebrating the life and work of Jesus before returning to the start of our church year next Sunday with the first week of Advent.

We know that Jesus accepted his public role as a prophetic leader. He acted differently than many kings. He was not bent on hoarding power by controlling others. His was another kind of power and leadership. I think of the reign of Christ as an experience of love and justice shared equitably by all parts of creation. As Christians, we are always striving to work with God in bringing about the reign of Christ.

I have come to a core belief in my spiritual journey as a Christian that heaven and hell are also here and now. They may also be eternal – beyond what we can conceptualize, but I know from experience that I have participated in cocreating heaven and hell right here and now. If heaven is the closest that we can experience to the love of God and hell is the furthest we can experience from the love of God, then I wonder (and I invite you to close your eyes at this time if you are comfortable doing so)

**– I wonder: If heaven is the closest that we can experience to the love of God and hell is the furthest we can experience from the love of God, what is an example of heaven that you have experienced in this lifetime?** I invite you to open your eyes to one another. Would anyone like to share aloud an example of heaven here and now – a sheer closeness to the love of God. What is that like?

*[Heaven is witnessing Little Miss Bacon who was not expected to live thriving at two years old. A taste of heaven can be Harvest Fest yesterday – strangers being welcomed warmly and strangers working together peaceably. Heaven is being at my mother’s side while she took her last breath. Heaven is being out in the community, shopping with my son who navigates life with Down syndrome and having a new friend behind me in the line saying “I’ve got it” and wanting to make that purchase alongside me and for me. Heaven is holding babies. Heaven is an inner space and energy that opens us up to others.]*

Susan Werner, in a song entitled “Help Somebody,” from her 2007 album, *The Gospel Truth* wrote lyrics I’m going to share with you. Susan is a self-proclaimed evangelical agnostic. She was raised Catholic, has studied Jewish and Christian scriptures, and honors them by bringing core teachings to light through her music. In the album *The Gospel Truth*, a beautiful gospel choir accompanies her singing. I think this is how she sees heaven:

*“I got plenty and then some*

*What do I do?*

*Plenty and then some*

*What do I do?*

*I got plenty and then some*

*What do I do, now?*

*I go out and help somebody  
Get plenty and then some, too”*

She goes on:

*“I got a roof over my head  
What do I do?...”*

*I got supper on the table  
What do I do?...”*

Then she goes on:

*“Cause I got it to give  
I got it to give  
And when you got enough to give away  
Well it's the only way to live*

*I'm going to heaven  
What do I do?*

*I go out and help somebody...  
Get to heaven, too”*

There is no more real version of heaven than that to me. And she echoes Tony Campolo, whom I spoke of earlier. And I want to repeat it for you so you can hear his thoughts again. Tony Campolo was an evangelical progressive Christian, sociologist, and Baptist pastor who died this past week. He has been influential in my journey. He has influenced countless people as an author and public speaker. He experienced a late career transition from more conservative to more progressive values.

In *Red Letter Christians: A Citizen's Guide to Faith and Politics*, Campolo writes:

*“Perhaps because our culture and politics have gone so off course, with values so contrary to those of Jesus, more and more people intuitively recognize that His vision of God's kingdom – a new world of compassion, justice, integrity and peace – is the Good News they've been searching and waiting for.”* And in a 2005 interview with John Oliver Mason of *The Progressive Magazine*, Campolo shared this: *“It's about time we realized that Christianity is a call not to conservatism but to change... Jesus came to the world not to conserve the system as it was, but to change the world into what it ought to be. That's where I am, and that's where I want to be.”* May Tony Campolo rest in deep peace.

We heard one more thought from Jesus. *“Do not worry.... Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... But **seek first the kingdom of God** and [God's] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* This is one of Jesus's statements – a theology (a talk about God) that is an abundance theology (that we can share all that is).

We hear Jesus echoed by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians. These are the words that were salient for me: *“[Our God] who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. **You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity...** the one who **sows sparingly** will also **reap sparingly**, and the one who **sows bountifully** will also **reap bountifully**. Each of you must **give as you have made up your mind**, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

We so often hear that little bit – that *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* But how about this? That *“you will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.”* We also often say that it is better to give than to receive. But these things are worth conversation. So I wonder one more thing this morning and invite you to share something aloud if you wish.

**I wonder: how have you been enriched by your own generous giving of your resources (be it energy, skill, time, or money)?** Any thoughts? *[Often hearing while moving around the Harvest Festival serving people, thanks in return – the joy of give and return.]* It's a question to take with us today.

Let's move with these teachers of generosity (these faithful, faithful ones) to give generously of ourselves in every way toward God's love and justice, because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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Matthew 6:19-21, 25-33, 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15

At this time, we have an extended moment to consider our own responses to the prompt on this slip of paper inside the worship bulletin:

**I want to invest myself more fully in what relationship or effort? by sharing what resources (your energy, time, care, money...)?** During the offering, you will have opportunity to bring this forward to the giving basket (or to send it forward with a neighbor). As your pastor, I would gladly hold these longings in confidence with you if you choose to write your name on it. Anonymous longings will also be incorporated into the quiet prayers of my heart.