

“Treasures That Matter”

B, Pentecost 21; Mark 10:17-31

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Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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Mark 10:17-31

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

I. SEEKING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES?

Let me tell you right now, I'm gonna cry. I believe tears are God's gift to our hearts and bodies both. For how else can we pour out our deepest sorrows and joys, find release and let others know how much they mean to us?

We need to give permission to one another to cry. Ed, my brother-in-law, showed us that courageously all week long. He was emotional – partly from the shock and seriousness of the situation, and partly from the medications and tumors – yet he expressed great love and concern for anyone he was talking to and felt it in return. “Just give me a minute” he'd say, as he got choked up on the phone, and then was chuckling again, like his old self.

I'm gonna cry because I'm going to talk with you about “treasures that matter”; about wealth of another kind. The man who ran up to Jesus and asked about eternal life wasn't just asking: “how do I

get saved, so I can go to Heaven?” (That notion wasn’t even part of the thinking in that day.)

He was obviously seeking *something*. He’d been a devout follower of his religion. Done the right things; followed the practices put before him from an early age. But, he was missing something. Missing something in his soul and in his external practice.

He was missing “treasure in heaven” because he was not finding it *around him* on earth. Right here – in front of him; all around. Jesus **intuited** that in this man’s case, it may well have been riches that were keeping him from noticing the treasures of a different kind that surrounded him. Jesus thought the best way for *this* particular person to wake up to the eternal life already surrounding him, would be to give up all that wealth, give to those in need and be free of those chains that bind.

This may well be different for each person. Jesus might tell another seeker that their obsession with climbing the ladder of success was what was keeping them from treasures on earth. Or, obsession with *anything* – maybe electronics or sports or having the most toys, or being in control.

What would Jesus tell *us* to do, in order to have treasures in Heaven *and* on earth? Could it be that we most need to take the blinders off and start *looking* around us, and we will find they were here all the time?

II. A WEEK IN INFAMY

This week was a week unlike anything our family has ever experienced. We’ve dealt with illness and accidents and cancer before, but this was a pile-up on the highway of life all at once –not spread out gently over time, so that one could take things a step at a time.

I’ll tell you the story in a nutshell in case you haven’t been following my Facebook and email updates.

Last Thursday the 4th, Clarke and I went to Durango to see our favorite singer, Dave Stamey, at the Durango Cowboy Gathering. We were looking forward to seeing my family too, as it had been a couple years since we’d been there—they’d built a new house on their farm—and we had catching up to do.

Ed, my brother-in-law, is a narrator on the Durango-Silverton Train, and plays the part of Otto Mears, the train tycoon who started it all. We went with Bonnie, my sister, to a restaurant near the depot for supper and waited for Ed to join us after the train came in.

He looked dapper in his top-hat and frock coat, but also very tired and a little ragged. We would soon learn why. The next day we enjoyed a nice breakfast and conversation and delved-into farm chores with them. They raise wonderful organic turkeys and we wanted one, so Clarke was going to get a lesson in butchering, and we all went out to plunge into scalding pots and chores.

I couldn't watch the actual moment of demise (of the turkey), so went out for a walk with the dog, but I *was* watching Ed's increasing struggles with coordination and mobility. I took Bonnie aside and started asking about what was different this morning vs. his recent "signs of aging". Clarke, meanwhile, was watching an alarming scene involving struggles with coordination, boiling water and sharp knives!

The spirits moved, phone calls were made, and soon we'd washed everything and everyone up and headed for the ER.

III. TREASURES THIS WEEK

In that moment, I knew that we were in the midst of a situation beyond our comprehension, and were witnessing a miracle –the first of many. You see, we *weren't supposed to be there*. For the concert on Thursday, yes—we'd bought tickets months ago—but I had a wedding in BV on Saturday and a rehearsal on Friday afternoon that I was supposed to be back for—so we'd intended to leave Durango Friday morning right after breakfast.

Plans just weren't coming together well midweek for my participation in the wedding and suddenly the couple had a "dear friend who is now going to officiate." I'd never been *fired* from a wedding before but I was happy about it! I missed my family and wanted to visit longer, and we'd been invited to ride in the Durango Cowboy parade on Saturday in a wagon with a friend and his horses.

So, there we were, on Friday, watching this drama unfold with a crucial role to play and *exactly* where we were supposed to be. I knew in that moment without a doubt that God works in mysterious ways and Kairos time is a whole 'nother thing—we were part of something much more than we could comprehend and the lenses we view life through had expanded in ways I could only give humble and mysterious thanks for.

The miracles continued throughout the week. Even as the news and Ed's condition continued to deteriorate. On Friday, before we'd even left Durango, we learned that my Mom was back in the hospital in Portland. Now we had another whole bunch of concerns, and coordinating with family there. Rocky needed to get to Denver for a deposition and all hands were needed on deck in Oregon as well as Colorado.

Sunday we learned that Rocky's other uncle, Steve, was having pretty serious kidney stone surgery in Denver, and other family members had medical and grief situations going on too.

But, even amidst all that, the treasures on earth and heaven appeared before us, and we *knew* the Lord was in this place. We knew that when it's all been said and done, that what matters is Presence. Of the Spirit, in the love and concern and connection with family, friends and even strangers.

Here are just a few of the “treasures that matter” that held us close and held us together in this one week that we will never forget.

Prayers from EVERYWHERE! – even Scotland!
(Scarlet Rae’s grandma) Prayers in the room with Ed and Bonnie, prayers in many churches and groups.
Priests and others bringing communion almost every morning, anointing with oil and prayers.

Someone told Ed the first morning in Denver that half of Durango was praying for him. That moved him more than any other message. He knew that he has touched many lives and has made a difference in an entire community. And now, they were giving back that love and support in spades.

Friends and Rocky’s dad made haste to get to the hospital on Saturday morning so Ed wasn’t alone there until we were able to drive from Durango. They consulted with the doctors and offered comfort.

Folks from this church contacted family in Denver, who offered places to stay and even a pick up at DIA for Rocky, so his Mom could stay at the hospital for the doctor consults. In fact, we had over 10 places we could have stayed. As it turned out, we were enveloped by some friends who greeted us every night with hugs and tears and late, yummy suppers, wine and listening ears.

Treasures sometimes come from the *other* side of the family! We learned Tuesday that our niece, Kelsey Poos-Benson, works as a PT at *that* hospital! By the time I tracked her down, she’d already been in to see Bonnie and Ed and assured them she’d keep close tabs on them. And yes, they remembered her as the 12-year-old from our wedding all those years ago! The last time they’d seen her.

Then she found me and wrapped her favorite aunt in some TLC and let me cry and let down – away from everyone else I was trying to be strong for. Another morning, I got to visit with mother-in-law Jean, and be enveloped in her love and support.

Treasures come from unexpected conversations. I called Nan Bohe on Wednesday because I hadn’t heard anything about Ada Morrison and knew Nan would know. I was saddened to learn of Ada’s passing but knew she was ready and it was time. Nan was there talking with Kathy Roman about my family and ended up ministering to me far more than I did to her.

All week long, the support from this congregation and the covering and carrying on were amazing! I was thrilled to receive pictures on Sunday after church of the beautiful World Communion you had here, and then emails and texts after the various groups and boards had met of the creative plans and ideas they’d started rolling. I couldn’t wait to come back – we have a fun Fall and winter ahead of us here at CUCC!

Social media was a treasure. The ability to easily spread the word and update everyone, and the prayers and support that came back literally got us through.

The wider church wrapped us like a blanket: UCC pastors and friends leant support: two prayed and cried with me when I went to church for their wonderful World Communion Sunday service, and offered every kind of help from where the best Asian food was to be found for Ed, to light-rail connections for me to go Downtown to a deposition, and Rocky to get to DIA from the hospital in the snow.

Public transportation was a treasure all in itself. The light rail came right to the hospital and went to the airport! I did not have to navigate Denver traffic in the rain and snow and rush hour or figure out where the heck to park downtown.

And then, one of those UCC pastors came and stayed with Bonnie and prayed with Ed through the pre-op and agonizing waiting involved in major surgery. He brought a prayer shawl, visited a good long while and waited till Rocky got there so they could hug and reconnect after getting to know each other on a youth trip years ago. And then, he promised to visit again tomorrow when I shared the news we received last night of the diagnosis.

Another UCC pastor messaged me: “send me your coffee orders!” I learned today that she just lost her own brother-in-law yesterday, yet was reaching out to me. Her parishioner (also named Rebecca) is the

chaplain at that hospital, so she’s sending her in tomorrow to my family.

Nurses and doctors were incredible treasures, including a doctor friend here in BV who let me text her with my worries the first day and seek guidance from someone with more authority than I. Flight crew from Durango could not have been kinder and good. They even found his lost glasses and made sure he got them back in Denver.

Smart phones! Smart phones in general were a treasure this week. Communicating with countless folks constantly, organizing the world, the bills, the farm from a distance.....in one amazing moment, the surgeon pulled up the cat scans results on his phone and read them to us, while also checking on his other patients in ER! Then, he was back and fully present with us. It was something to behold.

A lost phone was found (talk about a moment of grace!) It was Ed’s phone and that was truly his lifeline – being able to hear from loved ones far and near.

Even Siri was helpful! – although she sent us a different route to and from the hospital every time and got us a little more mentally confused than we were already!

CPC and CPFS – the community groups I work with and lead worked like a well-oiled machine in my absence –wow!

Even Frontier airlines was helpful with refunding and adjusting trips for my siblings. I'd bought Bonnie a ticket with airmiles to go together next week to see our Mom and coordinate her care for this last stage of life. She can't go now, but my brother needed to get here, so we did some "creative airline maneuvers."

Folks back in Durango stepped up to help on the farm—with bills and animals both. We are grateful for them, and for the 28 turkeys that are giving their lives for Thanksgiving!

Thursday the reinforcements called in from across the country. I knew I had to leave soon to get back here, and did *not* want to leave Bonnie dealing with all this alone. Our brother Bob hopped a plane from Portland the next day and has been there now for several days, while his wife cares for Rocky on the other end. Rocky is pretty shaken by this sudden illness of his favorite Uncle Ed. His dad is not in the best of health either, and his world is rocked.

Last night the Colorado cousins lined up to tag team, into this next phase. They will step-in on Wednesday and following.

IV. TREASURES OF FAITH

Ed got a big kick the other day out of the "interfaith prayers" coming from all directions. He told the nurse they are Catholic and that prayer shawl came from a Protestant pastor that I'm Protestant and just bought him a phone case from a Muslim who promised to pray for him 5 times a day!

I haven't told him yet about the Native spiritual healer and cancer survivor who came up to us in a bar and offered prayer ceremonies (Ed is part Choctaw); as well as Christian Science practitioners reaching out in the dark of night, holding him and his family close.

Thursday, I came home "Tired and inspired." Tired after being on the road or at the hospital for 8 days minus a half hour at home to re-pack and get to the hospital in Denver before dark and road exhaustion took over. Inspired by every single act of kindness we had experienced along this challenging journey—each one a moment of grace.

Friends called and texted and took me out for some horse therapy, soul-soothing music and dancing; helped with projects; took care of tasks that I'd not had time for.

As I came over Trout Creek Pass on Thursday evening, it wasn't quite dark and I looked up to see snow on Mt. Princeton! It brought tears to my eyes. I'm home and there's snow! Where it's *supposed* to be. Those mountains haven't been white for a long time. Treasures on earth; treasures in heaven.

"I'm not a mess but a deeply feeling person in a messy world. I explain that now, when someone asks me why I cry so often, I say, 'For the same reason I laugh so often--because I'm paying attention.' (Glennon Doyle Melton)

Paying attention.

V. TREASURES THAT MATTER

*Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees
Takes off his shoes –
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries.*

– Emily Dickinson

We look for heaven as something other, after, next, not now, not here. But “treasures in heaven” are all around us – the heavens are telling the glory of God!

Do we look, know, feel, taste and see the treasures that matter all around us, or do we sit around picking, nitpicking, plucking at temporary riches? Things that don't really matter.

VI. TREASURES RIGHT HERE:

Jim Close family/Garden—article and pic in the paper.
Paul and Patti and Karen and others working the garden and fertilizing in prep for winter.
Lenny and Casey – cleaning up plumbing yesterday!
Trustees responding and teamworking any and all issues around the church.
Rhonda stepping in so Janet can enjoy being a bowling champ with no worries!
Matthew and Barb and Betsy doing the impossible: covering for when Doyle is gone!
Molly getting word on Sat. afternoon that last Sunday's service needed a Celebrant, and stepping in – in a boot to boot!

Nancy in the Office stepping up to cover no end of projects with a little guidance from me, but not much! Ken called me Wednesdays to tell me the good news that all the cloth bags for Backpack (minus one – a sick boy) had been returned!

Treasures. One and all. You *all* are treasures! To me, my family and this church and community.

Mother Teresa:

“Don't' worry about the numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.”

WHEN IT'S ALL BEEN SAID AND DONE

When it's all been said and done
There is just one thing that matters
Did I do my best to live for truth?
Did I live my life for you?

When it's all been said and done
All my treasures will mean nothing
Only what I have done
For love's rewards
Will stand the test of time

When it's all been said and done, what matters is the treasure we find all around us – not material possessions or wealth of the worldly kind. Treasures of the heart – the love and presence of the Spirit in and through and among us. Let us live in that truth, through our tears, our joys and sorrow, making a difference in this world. ‘Cause it matters! It matters more than we'll ever know. Amen.