



The Things We Hold Dear
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; September 14, 2025
 14th Sunday after Pentecost
 Psalm 24; Matthew 6:19-24

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, begins with The Beatitudes and ends with the parable of the wise man who built his house upon the rock. Some have suggested the Sermon on the Mount might be better named *Wisdom from the Mount*, for within this sacred discourse we find a rich treasure of Jesus' most memorable teachings. Here, Jesus speaks with the voice of wisdom—offering guidance for everyday living: the call to do good and to practice self-restraint, the caution against judging others, the simplicity of the Golden Rule, sober warnings about the seduction of wealth, and much more.

If you've read the church newsletter, you know that our 2025 Stewardship theme is the simple phrase: "*Where Your Treasure Is.*" With that in mind, over the next three weeks, we'll be turning our attention to a small section of Jesus' wisdom teachings. We begin with three verses from Matthew 6—verses that shine with both clarity and conviction:

“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, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In this pericope, treasure refers to what we value most, what we invest ourselves in—be it time, attention, energy, or resources. It includes material possessions, yes, but more than that, it's about what we cling to, what we pour ourselves into, what we store up in hopes that it will give life meaning, purpose, or safety. It's the thing we guard, the thing we grieve when lost. And here's the truth: whatever we treasure, it will claim our hearts. So, the question Jesus places before us is not just “Where is your money?” It's “Where is your heart? What are you storing up? And is it leading you closer to God's presence, closer to the Kingdom of Heaven, closer to acts of mercy and kindness, closer to a life shaped by grace, generosity, and trust—or is it leading you further away?”

In the Hebrew Bible, wealth and possessions are sometimes a blessing from God, used for God's purposes, while at other times they become a snare, revealing misplaced trust and idolatry. Here are a few examples: Abraham was blessed with great wealth, but he held it loosely, trusting in God's promises rather than his possessions; Joseph managed Egypt's wealth during famine, using it to preserve life; the Israelites left Egypt with silver and gold—provided by God for their journey—but shortly thereafter, some of that same gold was melted down to make a golden calf to worship; Solomon's wealth was legendary, a sign of divine favor, but his heart drifted and his life choices eventually led him—and Israel—into spiritual compromise; when the Temple was built, treasure was poured into God's house of worship, but later, that same Temple was plundered by enemy kings when the people turned away from God; and finally, the Old Testament is filled with prophets crying out against hoarding wealth, exploiting the poor, and trusting in riches instead of Yahweh.

In each of these examples, the outcome—whether treasure became a force for good or a path to destruction—depended on how it was held: with open hands and trust before God or gripped tightly as a source of power and security. This truth is echoed in Jesus' own words of wisdom: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

As I prepared for this message, I found myself reflecting—perhaps more personally than usual—on the question of what I truly treasure in life, and how that has shifted with time. At twelve, I gave no thought to what sixty-four might feel like—to the ache of a weary body or the longing for more energy for the day. But life has a way of refining our values, doesn't it? Shifting our gaze from what glitters to what endures. And while I had intended to explore that theme more this morning,

those plans were overtaken by the sadness of this past week. Many of us are still shocked by the murder of Charlie Kirk—a husband and father, and a rising voice in right-leaning political circles—gunned down while exercising his right to free speech—and this—just a few weeks after Democratic Minnesota State Representative, Melissa Hortman, alongside her husband, Mark, and their dog, Gilbert, were assassinated in their own home. I mention all this with caution and humility, aware that emotions are raw and opinions run deep. But I believe that preaching is not meant to happen in a vacuum. Karl Barth once said that a pastor should preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. I take that to mean that the eternal word of God must speak into the very real and pressing concerns of our day. So, if anything I say today troubles you or strikes a chord you'd rather not hear—perhaps you'll offer a little grace to the preacher—and send your objections to Karl Barth.

First, a personal story: When I was ten, my aunt—who didn't consider herself a Christian—sent me this little King James Bible. I think she did it because my father had just taken me away from my beloved grandmother to live with him—first in Swannanoa, NC, and then in—of all places—White Pine, Tennessee. I was heartbroken and homesick—but this Bible became a treasure. (It's a mess now, from use and from traveling with me over the decades—and it has long since been set aside for more scholarly translations like the NRSVue—but it still holds a special place in my story.) Soon, I started attending a little Missionary Baptist church with my Uncle Clyde and Aunt Doris. It was there that I began to fall in love with the Scriptures – and to find hope that spread like a gentle light into some dark places of my life. But by the time I reached high school, I had been exposed to a variety of preaching in churches throughout my community. I paid attention. Some words were spoken with grace and love for all people, while others seemed intended to promote fear and condemnation. With all these mixed messages, I found myself struggling—not with the Bible itself—but with how the church interpreted it. I wrestled with questions I didn't yet have the language to fully articulate: How could the God of all creation only love the people I loved? How could my baptism be more sacred than someone else's just because it was done in a different tradition? How could we sing “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world” and then disparage children of color? And how could I, a girl created in the image of God, be told that I was somehow less than my male cousin who bore that same image? These were heavy questions for a teenager. And yet, they were part of my journey. This Bible—first given to me as a gesture of comfort—became something far greater: a sacred companion on the road to deeper faith—that ultimately led to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

I will always be deeply grateful for my roots in conservative Christianity, which introduced me to Jesus and helped me fall in love with God's Word. The sweet saints in that little church so many years ago provided kindness that fed my soul. I'm equally thankful for the spiritual mentors who eventually guided me into a more progressive denomination—one that strives to make space for everyone at Christ's Table. This community approaches Scripture not as a rigid rulebook, but as the living word of God—dynamic, layered, and open to faithful interpretation. It embraces a vision

of grace that exceeds human boundaries, affirms that faith and doubt can coexist, and sees honest questioning as vital to a healthy spiritual life. It understands the church as a community not only called to nurture personal faith, but also to pursue justice, peace, and the common good. And it welcomes preaching and teaching rooted in inclusion and compassion, celebrating the diversity of God's people, and honoring the many ways God's Spirit is at work in the world.

I didn't follow Charlie Kirk closely, but I knew enough about him to recognize that, theologically, philosophically, and practically, he and I stood worlds apart. He struck me as someone who treated his own interpretation of Scripture as a standard for deciding who belongs and who doesn't—an approach that feels all too familiar given my history in the church. That said, let me be absolutely clear: I have deep empathy for his family and for those who loved him. His life was tragically cut short by something our nation continues to face at an alarming rate—gun violence. Even though firearms have become the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States, our divided government remains unable—or unwilling—to pass basic, common-sense gun laws, like universal background checks and bans on assault-style weapons, that could help keep us all safer. And the aftermath of the shooting made painfully clear another issue of our time: the toxic undercurrent of social media. We now live in an age where sorrow, outrage, and rhetoric often collide before truth has a chance to speak. The noise is constant, and the harm is real. Make no mistake—hate-filled speech will never lead us out of the crisis we are in. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

As a nation, what do we really treasure? Is it violence, guns, and rhetoric that demeans and tears us apart? Or is it life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—for all people? As a church, what do we treasure? God's word as defined by me, myself, and I? Or God's Word that is interpreted in community with others so that we are challenged to learn and grow and become more like Jesus who is Love Incarnate? As individuals, what do we treasure? What do we hold dear? Our faith? Our loved ones? Our opinions? Our belongings? Our bank account? Our health? Our hope in a brighter tomorrow?

(If you haven't already, during the silence that follows, I invite you to respond to the question printed on the card inserted in your bulletin, “What do I treasure most right now?” You may place it in the offering plate during the offering.)

Jesus does not condemn *having* treasure, he only asks us to consider *what* we treasure, *where* we store it, and *why*—for where our treasure is—there will our heart be, also. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Silent Reflection]