

Where The Heart Leads
Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; September 21, 2025
15th Sunday after Pentecost
1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Matthew 6:19-24

Last week, you responded to the question: "What do I treasure most right now?" If you wonder what sorts of responses we received, you can find most of them woven into the word cloud that serves as the bulletin cover this morning.

In the late 90s, a high school friend and I felt a nudging by the Spirit to start a women's ministry at the church we both attended. For generations, women's circles had been the backbone of church missions and ministries across denominations. These groups were strong and active during a time when many women were homemakers and had more flexibility in their daily schedules. But by the mid to late 20th century, that landscape had changed. More women were pursuing higher education, building careers, and juggling multiple responsibilities outside the home. Participation in traditional women's circles began to fade—not from neglect, but from change—and in that fading, something important was lost—a space where hearts were known, where prayers were lifted for one another, and where mission often flowed out of friendship. Many found themselves longing for deeper connections. Tammy and I noticed that longing, too, and though we weren't sure what it would look like, we felt called to respond. We sensed that if we could create space for women to connect in a way that fit their lives—flexible, authentic, and deeply rooted in faith—something meaningful could grow. We were surprised—shocked, actually—by the enthusiastic response—a response that would eventually grow into a thriving women's ministry.

At about this same time, I was working as a laboratory manager for a reference lab, employed by a pathologist who was—let's just say—passionate about growth. (We'll call him Dr. Bob.) Dr. Bob built his business fast and furious: brick by brick, buck by buck, faster than you could say "show me the money." Expansion was the name of the game. Dr. Bob claimed to be a Christian—and I don't doubt that he was—but from where I stood, the only thing I ever saw him truly worship was the Almighty Dollar.

When Dr. Bob decided to invest in a new computer system to streamline the business, I was asked to help customize the software to fit the specific needs of our lab. Now, I'm good at many things—but this? This was way out of my wheelhouse. Still, I was promised the moon: more money, more opportunity, a bigger role in the company. And with a husband finishing a degree and four children ranging from elementary school age to college age, well—let's just say those kinds of promises sounded awfully appealing. So, I said yes. And I gave it everything I had. Or at least, I tried. But with each business trip to Plano, Texas, my spirit grew a little heavier. Something wasn't right. And finally, on one of those flights back to Tennessee, somewhere between takeoff and

landing, I felt the quiet, gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit saying, “*This isn’t how you are meant to live your life.*” That was the moment when my struggle with the call to go to seminary began in earnest.

I had once loved my work in patient care—running tests in Chemistry, Hematology, or Blood Bank at Morristown-Hamblen Hospital and UT Medical Center. That had felt meaningful. Tangible. Life-giving. But this? This felt like being on a ship going nowhere fast. The only place I felt truly anchored—outside of my own home—was in my spiritual home: the church. While it was my uncle who first introduced me to Jesus, planting a seed of faith in my young heart, it was the church that nurtured that seed. There I was baptized, offered spiritual guidance, and there, I was reminded that no matter how uncertain the path, I could always hope in a God who holds the future.

Looking back at the last days of my career in the field of laboratory medicine, I realize that what I was missing wasn’t just passion—it was *purpose*. My heart wasn’t in that work anymore because my heart had been claimed by something deeper. It was Christ’s Spirit that was compelling me to commit to a path that would require tremendous courage—a courage I wasn’t sure I possessed.

The decision to go to seminary wasn’t something I took lightly—how could it be? It meant walking away from a stable job, a steady paycheck, and a career I had worked hard to build. It meant stepping into the unknown, with no guarantees, just a quiet, persistent sense that God was asking me to trust. Kinney—and even Samuel, who was old enough by then to sense the shift happening in our household—believed in my calling before I fully did. And their affirmation was like a ray of light—providing me just enough hope to keep moving forward.

To give you a sense of how scary this all was, when the moment finally came to walk into Dr. Bob’s office and tell him I was going to seminary—it felt less like giving notice and more like preparing to jump off a cliff. But his reaction did provide a moment of comic relief. Stunned, he shook his head and said, “Why would you want to do that? You’ll never make any money at it.” While he wasn’t wrong about that part, he completely missed the point. Because this wasn’t about money—it was about faithfulness—it was about trusting the leading of the Spirit—even when it defied logic—even when there were no guarantees of success by the world’s standards.

There are moments in life when you follow the Spirit’s leading—not because it’s easy, but because your heart is no longer your own. Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” And when your heart belongs to God, the things that once seemed so important may begin to loosen their grip. What takes their place, though, may be something far richer: hope, community, purpose. That’s what the church has given me. And while each of us has our own

unique faith journey, I imagine many of you have experienced something similar—moments of grace, belonging, or purpose found within a community of believers.

My calling led into full-time vocational ministry—but calling isn’t just for pastors. It’s not limited to pulpits or seminaries or church offices. Every one of us, in our own way, is called. Some are called to teach truth or to tell stories; to serve meals or to serve justice; to build homes or to repair hearts; to lead with vision or to encourage with grace; to offer hospitality or to offer healing; to pray in quiet or to speak boldly. But all of it—*all of it*—is ministry when it flows from a heart that belongs to God.

This church—*your* church—is not merely a place you come to on Sundays. It’s your spiritual home—a place that holds your memories, lifts your burdens, and calls you into something greater than yourself. It’s a place to which your heart leads you—again and again. And it’s a place that is made better by your presence, your energy, and your contributions of time, talent, and treasure.

As we are in the midst of our 2025 stewardship campaign, “*Where the Heart Is*,” I invite you to remember this: When we align our hearts with God’s dream for the world and when we give generously to that vision, we are doing more than funding a budget. We are fueling a mission. Our commitment puts feet to our faith. Because giving is not just about finances. It’s spiritual. It’s sacred. It’s a way of saying with our lives:

“I believe in this church.”

“I believe in the God who brought me here.”

“I believe in a better world—and I want to be part of building it.” Amen.

At this time, please respond to the question on the card inserted in your bulletin: “What do you love most about this church?” Our children and youth will collect your responses, shortly.