

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Treasure in Heaven"

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Opening Hymn: Praise to the Lord 321

Closing Hymn: Take my life, and let it be consecrated 637 (tune: Hendon)

Children's Hymn: Lord, I Want to Be a Christian 571

Choir: "Bread and Wine, Wine and Bread" & "Communion Prayer"

Choruses: You are my all in all, I desire Jesus, Remember and proclaim

Rev. Steve Filyk

February 3, 2019

A couple weeks ago

There was a splash of publicity over what was said to be
 The largest single private donation to a cultural organisation
 In the history of British Columbia.

The Chan family donated \$40 million for
 The Vancouver Art Gallery's \$350 million building project.

Maybe not surprising, the gallery's new building
 will be called the 'Chan Centre for the Visual Arts'.ⁱ

This is an extraordinarily large and generous gift,
 But like much philanthropy these days
 This gift involves more than a little self-interest.

Attaching the family name to this building, this institution,
 Will provide untold free publicity and goodwill,
 And accomplish more than any paid advertising campaign.

When I was reading the story online
 The response wasn't all positive:

One commentator said:

“The name should remain the same...the Vancouver Art Gallery.
The majority of the funds came from the public taxpayer
not one family.”

Another chimed in:

“Why do rich people feel [compelled]
to have their name on any building they can.
As a philanthropist he could donate anonymously!”

PAUSE

I wonder if these people who are critical of philanthropy
Would have similar complaints about religion.

At its best religion is about honoring God.

At its best Christian piety is a grateful response to God’s grace

But religion is also impacted, sometimes upended, by self-interest.

Those very acts that were intended to bring us

Closer to God can become the means

Of feeding our own egos; honoring ourselves.

Jesus paints a dramatic, humorous caricature

Of some religious folks:

“Here come the almsgivers into the courts of God...

accompanied by the brass section of the symphony.

They give a few dollars to this cause,
and the trumpets fanfare;
a few dollars more to another cause,
and the trombones blare a salute.

Everyone watching says, "My, they are generous!"
Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."

Over there stand people praying.
You know they are praying
because everyone in the room knows their praying.

People blocks away may hear their praying,
and the words go on and on and on,
always stretching for one more crumb of emotion
and another shred of humility.

People listening to them may say, "My, my, they certainly pray well."
Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."

[And] Here come people fasting.
You know they are fasting by their gaunt faces
and eyes crazed from lack of sugar.

They have mussed their hair and torn their garments
because you have to do something to show people you are fasting.
The problem with fasting is that no one can see
what you are **not** doing.

What is the good of that?

So these folks stagger [during fellowship time
 And dramatically wave away the goodies.
 They tell you loudly, 'no sugar in the coffee today!'.]

Onlookers will declare, "Oh, they certainly are religious!"
 Jesus declares, "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."ⁱⁱ

Of course our use of religion isn't always so obvious.
 We Presbyterians tend to be reserved people,
 Understated in our ways.

And so you might need a micrometer
 To judge whether a Presbyterian is really honoring God
 Or whether they are just glorifying themselves.

Where is your heart today?

Reflecting on Calvin's emphasis on soli Deo Gloria (to God alone)
 One commentator remarks that:

"any attitude or influence that causes us to think chiefly of ourselves
 and the impression we are creating
 detracts absolutely from the "chief end" of faith,
 which is to know and be known by God."ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus warns us that using religion for self-promotion
 Is a really poor choice, a poor investment.
 It might seem to meet a need at the moment,
 But there are no ongoing benefits.

Instead Jesus encourages us
 To keep our focus on our heavenly Father.

He tells us that directing our attention to God has much greater value.
 Moreover the benefits that are experienced in the present
 Stretch all the way into the future.

Tom Wright argues that “As with other references to heaven and earth,
 we shouldn’t imagine [that when Jesus talks about treasures
 in heaven he] means
 ‘don’t worry about this life—get ready for the next one’.

‘Heaven’ here is where God is right now,
 and where, if you learn to love and serve God right now,
 you will have treasure in the present,
 not just in the future.^{iv}

Just consider those Christian practises of generosity,
 Prayer, and fasting.

Sharing with **others** reminds us of God’s ongoing care for us.
 Prayer helps us understand what God is accomplishing in our lives.
 Fasting if you dare do it,
 teaches us what is ultimately important.
 These three practises when used to focus on God
 End up filling our deepest needs
 for security, and purpose, and direction.

This is valuable today, tomorrow
 And far into the future.

So what do you do if you are misguided in your religion?
 Jesus tells us that we can adjust our focus.

He provides direction

On how to live out our piety

So that our heart remains in the right place.

When it comes to your giving

Let it be “modest, undemonstrative,
 almost anonymous—“done in secret” ...”

When it comes to your prayer

Let it be “quiet, private, brief—
 as direct as the Lord's Prayer...”

When it comes to fasting

“no ostentation... no display—
 wash your face [and] comb your hair...”

Jesus believes that if we adjust our focus

Our loyalty will follow.

“For where your treasure is,
 There your heart will be also”.^v

So where is your treasure this morning?

ⁱ “Chan family donates \$40M to Vancouver Art Gallery” CBC News January 23, 2019 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/chan-family-donates-40m-to-vancouver-art-gallery-1.4989885>

ⁱⁱ Patrick J. Willson “Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Homiletical Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.* *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Douglas John Hall “Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Theological Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.* *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide.*

^{iv} N.T. Wright *Matthew For Everyone: Part 1*, 67

^v Matthew 6:21