



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, February 9, 2020
The Fifth Sunday After The Epiphany

Festal Evensong
at 4:00 p.m.

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Alison J. Turner,
Associate for Children and Family Ministry

on
2 Timothy 2:14-21

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What do you treasure?

This was the opening question in my first public speaking presentation way back when I was nine years old. It was titled *Collecting Treasure* and I proceeded to unpack a huge container of special collections: pins, stamps, bookmarks, patches, pens, coins.... the list went on and I proudly announced myself to be phillumenist. Having just discovered the word, which meant I too was a proud collector of matchboxes, and then came the display of my final collection, an array of delicate bone china vases, Goss china, bearing crests of seaside towns.

Each thing displayed that day was of little monetary value or even use to anyone else in my class, and yet these small tokens served to represent a memory or story of a time, person, or place; they were of great importance, for they were indeed my treasure.

In our second lesson this evening, we also heard of treasure, found in a large house. Some useful, some merely decorative; some costly while others were very ordinary. Paul's letter to Timothy was probably his last letter from prison. Paul was a mentor to his longtime friend and associate. In his letter, he offered words of advice and encouragement, and it is almost as if he is passing on a baton of leadership to the community of his day. We too are urged to consider not only the physical vessels or treasures of the church, but the treasure that is the church community and how might we honor and give of our very best to God.

This same theme is explored by the Early Church Fathers including Saint John Chrysostom, in reflecting how might we further our offering to God, not simply in action, but in the attitudes of our hearts as found in his writings on *Wealth and Poverty*. Chrysostom's teaching on God's bias to the poor is perhaps summed up in these words: "If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door, you will not find him in the chalice." An echo of the earlier conviction of St Lawrence, a deacon of the early church, who when asked, by a judge for "the treasures of the Church", to the consternation of the magistrate gathered together the impoverished, the disabled, the widowed, the orphaned, the sick, and the elderly, and brought them before the court and exclaimed, "These are the treasures of the Church."

In the 1990's in Great Britain there was a very amusing television program called 'How clean is your house?' Hosted by two flamboyant women with yellow rubber gloves, feather dusters, and all kinds of cleaning materials, they were tasked to go into people's homes in order to motivate them to clear away the clutter; to tidy, to sift and sort out what they really needed, rather than hoarding useless objects. The long-term results

were positive, stunning, and sometimes healing, as some experience today with the radical decluttering regimes of tidying expert Marie Kon, their motivation was to “spark joy”. But oftentimes, the guests on the program were frequently overwhelmed and found themselves in tears, as the two women proceeded to throw things away - prize possessions, treasures, vessels, and simply things they found hard to let go of.

Perhaps you have had the painful task of clearing a loved-one’s home after their death and sifting through the years not simply of beautiful valuable possessions – but of memorabilia damaged, clung to, broken, faded letters and even the cheap trinkets that were all treasure to them.

As we regularly enter into a time of spring cleaning at this time of year: Are there things in our lives, our souls that we find hard to let go of? That need to be sifted and sorted?

In the West, we live in a world where so much is disposable, temporary, or throw away. In Japan, there is an art called *kinsugi*, “golden repair”, where artists take broken or cracked vessels and paint the cracks with a golden lacquer. Rather than seeing the flawed pieces as worthless or broken, the very faults become something beautiful – something to be cherished and integral to the whole.

As Christians, we do not need to camouflage or hide what we see as flaws but, rather, recognize that they are part of who we are and that God can make them precious both within ourselves and our neighbor. For those very flaws represent our story and help us to become fully human.

Some words of Archbishop Rowan Williams: “Jesus said where our treasure is, that's where our hearts will be. Our hearts will be in a very bad way if they're focused only on the state of our finances. They'll be healthy if they are capable of turning outwards, looking at the real treasure that is our fellow human beings.”
(New Year message, 2009)

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