18th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP
Rolling Meadows - 1963

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 6: 19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

THE DISCIPLES' TREASURE

If you could wave a magic wand and have one wish fulfilled - whatever it might be - what would you ask for? Or to put it negatively: If you were to lose everything in life except one thing, what would you hold on to? Would it be your husband or wife, your children, your father or mother, your home, your possessions, your job, your pleasures, good times, your health - or would it be God in Christ? Don't answer the question too quickly. Let us be brutally honest. Our human nature has a way of circumventing the truth, of rationalizing our actions, of making us believe what is not really true. What is it that comes first in your life, that you prize most highly, that takes complete precidence over everything else you have. Take the time to think about it. How has this first love reflected itself in your life?

The real Christian, of course, has only one answer. His first love, his first loyalty, his first commitment is GOD IN CHRIST. His real treasure is in heaven. In an age of materialism and carnal security, this is a truth that needs repeating. Because we are such earth-bound creatures, there is always the temptation to divide our heart between God and things. But the heart cannot be so divide It is either - or! Neither the love of things nor the care for things has any place in the disciple's life. Jesus' words are clear and pointed: No man can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and Mammon. If a man loves things, just things if he commits himself to laying up treasures on earth, to the pursuit of a decent standard of living or the good life, he has committed his heart to that which perishes - and his heart will perish with the things that fill it. He has exposed, not only his clothing and possessions, but his very ~~life~~ soul to the eathing of the moth the canker of the rust, and the subtle hands of thievery. When a man wholeheartedly takes things, he cannot any longer take or leave them; he is taken by them, and his eternal destiny is determined by them. They become his god.

Jesus is not imposing a rule of poverty upon his disciples. It is ultimately not a question of how much a man has, but of how deeply he is concerned about having. And we will do well to remember that a man can be as deeply involve in a few things as in many. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also

Whatever gets your attention gets you. Earthly treasures tend to crowd God out of a man's life. This is illustrated pointedly by E. Stanley Jones. He tells how a villager in India looked through the window of a government house and saw a European reading before a candle stuck in a whisky bottle. The villager ran off to his village and announced, Now I know what the white man worships - he worships the whisky bottle, for I saw him burn a light before it, and he had a book open before it and was saying his prayers to it. There is just enough truth in that to make it sting. Modern man worships the intoxicating pleasures of life, and he says to the Golden Calf of material gain, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. Instead of having one aim, one love, one purpose, one treasure, one Christ, one God, modern man has a whole raft of lesser, inferior aims and ambitions.

Things are pushed and pressed on us from every side. Look at the window displays in the stores. Page through the ads in our newspapers and magazines. Listen to the commercials on radio and television. Our earthly nature goes for the things we can see and touch and taste. Money talks, we say. Nothing succeeds like success. The result is that a man toils till late hours in order to make more, to get more, to have more. In the process he neglects his home, his wife, his children, his friends, his church, his Bible, his God, his prayers - just to acquire more things. And the appetite keeps growing with the eating. He can never fill the bottomless bag. The more he gets the more he craves. In the end he finds he has forfeited the great treasures of God for a lot of trinkets. One day God wil say to him, as He said to the barn-building farmer, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou has provided Is it any wonder that Jesus warned His disciples: Lay not up for yourselves trea-

sures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break throug and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Life without God is empty and hollow - filled with nothingness. No number of things can still the deep hunger of the soul. John Marquand, in his book, Point of No Return, tells the story of Charley Gray, a brilliant young man who was driven by a desperate desire to become vice-president of the Stuyvesant Bank. Aft months and years of waiting and hoping and working, he at last got the job. But almost immediately he was overcome with a strangely hollow, empty feeling of frustration and futility. He was vice-president - but what was there beyond that? His soul was empty. When will we learn that even the presidency of the greatest bank will not fill up our soul's emptiness, nor will the headlines in all the newspapers nor the crowd's shouting our praises, nor the million dollars we thought would do it! Crowns are empty things, and so are bank accounts and all the other things we well our souls for.

Do you remember the story of Zacchaeus? He was a little man and must have had an inferiority complex. He was driven by a burning desire to be top dog, to show 'em. His ambition made him a good business man and very successful. He became chief tax collector, and very rich. He had everything money could but. But these treasures did not satisfy. His soul was empty, and he knew it. What else would cause this little rich man to go running out on the road after a simple Galilean carpenter - much less climb a tree in such undignified fashion, just to get a glimpse of Jesus? And of all trees, the sycamore is no tree to climb. The fuzz underneath its leaves gets into your eyes and makes you sneeze. Can you imagine Zacchaeus with his eyes watering skinning down the tree when Jesus looked up and said to him, Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for today I must stay at your house?

Why did Zacchaeus do these things at the risk of being laughed at? It was more than curiosity. Luke says it was because he sought to see who Jesus was.

He had heard of Jesus - His love, His compassion, His mercy. No doubt his friend Levi, the chief tax collector at Capernaum, had told him how Jesus risked the hatr of the Pharisees in order to eat at his house; and of His wonderful words as they sat around the table. Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus' claim of being able to forgive sins. More than all else that is what he needed. He was rich, respected, well-fed, but his soul was empty! Empty! This emptiness was crying out for something that would fill it.

Today salvation has come to this house. Thus Jesus described what had happened to Zacchaeus. Salvation had come to his house and filled the emptiness of his life with abundant meaning, joy, love, peace, forgiveness. From that time on Zacchaeus was no longer bent on laying up earthly treasures for himself. His life was no longer hollow and empty. It was a new life and a new stewardship that meade him say, The half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold. His money was no longer a weapon against the world. It was no longer an end in itself. His wealth was now a method, a mean of expressing the divine purpose of his new life. He was in business now not for himself but for his Lord.

So it must be with us. You will never get over your emptiness until your whole life becomes a stewardship of all that you are - talents, time, possessions, strength. Your life will never be loaded with sunhine until you find peace with God in Christ, and this never happens until you are going God's way - all the way, rather than your own way.

What is your greatest need and mine? Let's face it! The one thing that we need most of all is to have a reason for living, a goal toward which we are moving. We need to know that we belong again to God - that He knows us and calls us by our name. It is our sin and shame and guilt that has separated us from God. But listen: Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. The wall is down. It has been removed by the blood of Jesus. Trusting in Christ, you can say, My God - you can possess God and own Him

as your Father. Christ and His Cross of redeeming love, the peace of His forgiveness, the joy of His salvation, the wonder of a new life lived in Him and for Him forever - these are the treasurers that neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and tha thieves cannot take away.

These treasures are permanent. Earthly fortunes may dwindle. Everythin else will inevitably pass away. But not this. No accident can rob you of this. No sickness can take it away. Unfaithful friends cannot deprive you of it. Even death cannot wrench it out of your heart. Say it to yourself now, with St. Paul: I am persuaded that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.