

# Treasure

God of grace, the end of our searching, help us to lay aside all that keeps us from seeking your kingdom, and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price, through Christ, our Savior. Amen.

*Based on the Additional Collects, The Church of England*

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## THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (PROPER 14C)

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16, Psalm 33:12-22, Luke 12:32-40

August 7, 2016

### ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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#### THE GOSPEL READING: LUKE 12:32-40

Jesus said to his disciples, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves. But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

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#### ***Kindness***

~Naomi Shihab Nye~

from *Words Under Words: Selected Poems*

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride

thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
It is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye, recently interviewed by Krista Tippett on her *On Being* radio program, is the daughter of a Palestinian father and a mother from St. Louis. She grew up in Ferguson, Missouri, Ramallah and Jerusalem and currently lives in San Antonio, Texas.

She wrote the poem *Kindness* in a plaza in Popayan, Colombia, on her honeymoon. She had gotten to that plaza after she and her

husband and an entire bus load of passengers were robbed of everything they had and left by the side of a road – where one of the passengers was also killed. All she had left was a small notebook and pencil that was in her back pocket – which allowed her to write down this poem that, she felt, was dictated to her by a voice from across the plaza.

Krista Tippett notes that

today this poem “is carried around in the pockets and memories of readers around the world.”

In this gospel reading Jesus urges his listeners – including us, now, to make purses that do not wear out, safe from thieves and moths. He tells us to be dressed for action, with lamps lit; waiting for our master to return so we may open the door as soon as the master comes and knocks. Jesus reminds us that if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into....

But let’s not be blindly optimistic: I know myself – and probably some of you who either haven’t or won’t or can’t do any of these things – either now or at some point in our lives.... And we’ve missed it – we weren’t home at all when the knock came at the door or the thief was breaking in.... We were distracted, preoccupied with something that seemed more important. And when God’s own self came – God comes to us, to our neighbors, to our world again and again – God found us where we ended up, destitute or dead by the side of the road – having lost everything.

And we see this happening over and over in our world today.

Fear sets in, terror strikes... for us, for the impoverished, the wealthy, the refugee, the family, the widow, the child or teen, the young

adult, or old, ill or injured, the fit or disabled....

What will I do now? How will I survive?

Jesus speaks of treasure.... an unfailing treasure... and says: where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We think of treasure as something we possess, something we have, something that is ours, ours not yours, not someone else’s; ours, not the thief’s, ours to hold onto, not to be lost to a moth or passing time or inattention or violence.... Our notion of treasure is finite, it has boundaries, something we’ve earned, that we deserve for reasons we feel we can explain and justify, to which we are entitled....

But what happens when it is suddenly all gone – dissipated, destroyed, lost – or perhaps it is, to all outward appearances still there but has become meaningless, worthless, because *something else in life has changed* – and changed everything... what then?

Jesus attempts to awaken us in our slumber.

And, in any case, he directs us to treasure that is not finite but infinite... enduring in all circumstances – and beyond all circumstances.

But, like the poet, some of us mere mortals don’t awaken until it is too late.

As Naomi Shihab Nye writes: Before you know what kindness

really is/ you must lose things,/ feel the future dissolve in a moment/ like salt in a weakened broth.

While God longs for us to hear the warning, heed the call, arise to the teaching, God also knows that most of us will find the treasure of kindness, the treasure of compassion only *after* the bus ride, *after* the destitution, *after* the utter loss, **maybe** not dead on the side of road, but now seeing (clearly) how that one could have been us: “he too was someone/ who journeyed through the night with plans/ and the simple breath that kept him alive.”

And this is the way of the world these days, isn't it?

Discovering again and again that all is lost. And then we go on deluding ourselves that we will avoid the thief, the calamity....

How critical to be people who can live in the abundance of the real treasure, the kindness, the heart of God, and offer that in season and out, from our own *acknowledged* depletion, from our own experiences of disorientation, confusion and lack.

I think of that doctor at Stanford who says that the next great age for humanity is the Age of Compassion... after the Enlightenment when ideas were everything, after the collapse of institutions, after all that promised safety for at least some people... that gradually we will all discover

that the only way out of the darkness, the violence, the failures of thought and intention and action will be compassion. The best of what humanity is given is compassion, kindness, the treasure that arises from the essence, the very heart of God – that we cannot possibly imagine for a moment is ours alone to be hoarded and protected.

What can it mean for each of us and for all of us together as we live in this faith community – and among all the communities we live in and serve? How can we give ourselves to have our priorities reordered by the Spirit? How can we lay aside, let go some of the distractions to actually show up and take our place with others – maybe people well known to us, maybe strangers – with whom we share life and share purpose, meaning, a mission of loving the world with God?

This past week, Fr. Richard Rohr shared the profound insight of Thomas Merton after Merton's deep conversion on March 18, 1958, while standing on the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, Kentucky.

Merton writes: “At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which

God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is, so to speak, [God's] name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship [and daughtership]. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.”

Fr. Richard comments: “Most people spend their entire lives living up to their false self, the mental self-images of who they think they are, instead of living in the primal ‘I’ that is already good in God’s eyes. But all I can ‘pay back’ to God or others or myself is *who I really am*. This is what Merton is describing above. It’s a place of utter simplicity. Perhaps we don’t want to go back there because it is too simple and almost too natural. It feels utterly unadorned. There’s nothing to congratulate myself for. I can’t prove any worth, much less superiority. There I am naked and poor. After years of posturing and projecting, it will at first feel like

nothing.”

And yet it is our treasure – our only treasure – and the treasure that will always be with us, what Merton calls: “the pure glory of God in us.”

Fr. Richard writes: “A Zen master would call the True Self ‘the face we had before we were born.’ Paul would call it who you are ‘in Christ, hidden in God’ (Colossians 3:3). It is who you are before having done anything right or anything wrong, who you are before having *thought* about who you are. Thinking creates the false self, the ego self, the insecure self. The God-given contemplative mind, on the other hand, recognizes the God Self, the Christ Self, the True Self of abundance and deep inner security.”

The deepest kindness....

Profound, essential compassion: our hearts and our treasure are one.

Here is all that is life itself and undying abundance we share in sharing life with friend and stranger....

Unfailing treasure.



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