

# There Your Heart Will Be

Depths of Love

**ASH WEDNESDAY, YEAR B**

Ash Wednesday is about refocusing and realigning ourselves in relationship to God and one another. We must encounter our sinfulness and frailty not with shame and blame but with honesty and truth, trusting that God receives our confession.

## REFERENCES

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalm 51:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

## COLORS

Purple

For all that Jesus seems bothered by stuff, he is in favor of treasures. Did you notice? It's not, "Stay away from treasure, it's bad for your health." No, treasuring is ok. It's what we choose to treasure that's the issue. Some treasures aren't worth storing up. Or piling up. Or tucking into the attic so that when you dig it out, you say with a sigh, "What were we thinking, keeping this? The stuff around here just wears out, gets stained and becomes unwearable; it rusts." Rusts? What did they have that rusted in Jesus' day? Well, the word is "*brosis*" in Greek. It often refers to food that gets eaten. Consumed. Used up. Worn away until you don't recognize it anymore.

No, apparently there is treasure; and there is treasure. Some treasures are worth treasuring; some are just fit for the junk heap. How do you know? How can you tell the difference? How do we know we are saving the right things? Treasuring the right things?

Well, some say it is all about the tally sheet. You've got to pile up a good score in heaven. Every act of service is another star in your crown. And our goal is to get lots of stars, lots of jewels—not to earn our place in heaven; that comes by the grace of God. No, this is about the furnishings—a better mansion, plush carpets, bigger windows, more floors. They're building us a dwelling place out of the materials we send up from here. Some say.

I'm not convinced, frankly. Stuff is stuff. It seems that if Jesus were against too much stuff here, he would be against too much stuff there. Don't you think? So, it doesn't sound like the treasure Jesus wants us to treasure is more stuff, divine or otherwise.

What if our math is wrong? What if it isn't, "Do this to get that?" What if the treasure isn't the end product, the reward, or the payment for our acts? What if it is the act itself? What if it is not the result of our action, but the action itself? What if the treasure is not something we can hold in our hands but something we *do* with our hands?

In other passages when Jesus shares this secret, he tells someone, the rich young man, "Sell everything and give the money to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven." We think, "We get something; when we get to heaven, there will be something there because we've done this great thing." Maybe not. He says, "Do this, and you will have." Go and sell and you will have your treasure. In the selling and giving, that's the treasure. That's the gift. That's the blessing—the doing.

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Live your life in such a way that you know the blessing every day. Live your life so that you are treasuring what lasts into eternity. That's what Jesus is trying to point out to us. Some treasure is eaten away, and some treasure lasts and nothing in this world can take it away. An act of kindness lives forever. Love lived out lasts forever. Goodness outlasts bitterness. Joy endures, while despair fades. An act of generosity is treasured for eternity.

Remember that this passage about treasure is a part of the longer conversation about prayer. It is about not making a show of our piety, about making sure that the focus is not on outward expression. It is not about impressing the gathered crowds and overhearers, but rather, God. Jesus says the treasure is a conversation with God or maybe even simply sitting in the presence of God. That's what we treasure. We fast, not to punish our bodies or even to deny ourselves, but simply so that we can have more time, more focused time, with God. We experience the Spirit best, says Jesus, when we pay attention; when we wake up to the possibilities of presence. Sure "woke" gets a bad rap these days. But better awake than asleep when it comes to spending time with God, to

setting aside everything that the world says matters and enjoying communion with God. Ash Wednesday is about setting an agenda to focus on that relationship.

Yeah, it's scary to cast off the stuff that defined a life or seemed to, anyway. That is a loss, to be sure. But what cannot be lost are all the moments we've treasured together, the lives that we've lived, the experiences we've shared. Even when we forget them, and I suspect we will, they will be ours in eternity. When we meet, we will remember and be remembered. And what greater treasure can there be than that?

//

**Notice at collection**

**Your Privacy Choices**

