

“Soul Investment” (Luke 12:13-31)
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For Tom and me this summer has been a reorientation of our souls' investment. The major reorientation was selling our home of 17 years where we moved with the girls shortly after our marriage. It was a great home for raising a family, but over the last couple of years it had really become a burden. It was too big to keep up while working both of our very full-time jobs. The pool, the yard, the expenses of maintenance had become a weight on us, and we realized that we wanted to spend our time on other more important things. Also, in three years we can join those happy residents at Pilgrim Place, and though I don't plan to retire then, we will be settled. So selling our house and leasing for 3 years (with no worries about repairs, earthquakes, remodels, and the like) felt like a good idea; and we're glad we did! We're in a different season of life than when we needed a family home.

Now our “soul investment” is oriented towards our present work and less worry about our home as our major retirement investment. We also finished updating our estate planning with a visit to Christina's dad; and this practice, too, helped us to think about our soul investment as it relates to our possessions. In spite of all the work of moving, being in transition, and updating our legal papers, we feel lighter. A burden has been lifted. Today the decisions of where Tom and I invest ourselves is not the same as many of you with young children to raise. I remember those days of investing ourselves heart and soul into raising our girls; it was demanding, exhausting, expensive, and worth every bit of it! I believe young parents should be encouraged and their work valued for they do what I believe is the most important work of all.

Today's gospel reading reminds us of how easily we can get caught up with wanting more until our lives are consumed with possessions and what to do with them once we have them. Jesus warns us that life is so much more than stuff. Less IS more. Life is being invested in God; being rich toward God. How that plays out varies within the context of our lives and what God calls us to do in the moment.

I remember when I was in high school, I would get up before school and often read verses 22-34 nearly daily. I was a rather strange teenager, I admit. I was also troubled and needed the comfort of hearing Jesus say, “don't worry, be happy!” (My paraphrase of course.) These verses remind us that worry is futile; worry doesn't do anything for us but perhaps exhaust us and leave us feeling spent. Then there's the beautiful words about the lilies and the grass of the fields. I think this is why being in nature is so renewing to us. Usually when one goes camping on backpacking, what you can take with you is very limited. You pack light and don't have so much to keep track of. You don't worry what you look like. Your meals are simple. And in a stripped down lifestyle you look around at the glory of creation and realize that all this beauty and life exist without your lifting a finger. It is humbling; it is renewing to know that indeed creation exists apart from us and there is mystery to life.

Natalie Sleeth's song reminds us of this: *In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree, in cocoon's a hidden promise that butterflies will soon be free unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.* It should come as a relief to know that WE are not the center of the universe.

Someone else is moving and creating and breathing life into a world that sometimes seems very threadbare and worn. Jesus says: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is God's good

pleasure to give you the kingdom.” We are free to invest our souls and all that we have because we are part of something larger than ourselves.

If we’ve shared the sacred journey with a dear one through the valley of shadows, we have observed “soul investment” at perhaps its clearest and best. The gift of age is the wisdom to know what is truly important and where our treasure really lies.

Relinquishment whether it is a house too big, too many stocks and bonds to keep track of, too much stuff to dust, too much clutter to distract us, too many electronic things to numb our thinking, or anything else that keeps us from being our very best for God and others is a gift of reorienting our souls investment.

Wisdom is in knowing that our true treasure lies in relationships with God and with one another. When everything else is gone, relationships remain. They continue even after death. In the hospital room of the dying there’s not a lot of stuff that means very much except those we love holding our hand.

Relationships matter; relationships are primary; God is a relational God, and relationships endure. Stuff can disappear in a fire or flood or earthquake or lost income. Jobs can disappear with an oil spill, a recession, the greed and dishonesty of some that brings a country to its knees. But if you are surrounded with friends and family to sustain you and with a relationship with the Holy One, your soul investment will see you through.

I’ve seen many people struggle through this economic downturn. The ones who have the easier time are those for whom relationships were important BEFORE they lost their jobs, For these folks, relationships were more important than acquiring material wealth, and therefore, their investment portfolio has continued to go up. The people who struggle the most have invested themselves in all those things that don’t last, don’t stand the test of time, and they are without the treasure of relationships that endure no matter what.

Holy Communion allows for us a reality check of our soul investments. It is a simple yet powerful ritual that reminds us of what truly matters. As Jesus said, when you eat this bread and drink this wine, remember me, remember our relationship, and don’t forget to invest your treasure in God and the creation that God so loves. May this be our souls’ investments today and in all the days to come.