

Where Your Treasure Is

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Pay attention that you so that you do not make sure that your acts of righteousness are noticed by other people. When you as an individual give to someone who is needy, make sure that no one find out about it from you. It is better when another person praises you and not your own lips.

Do not tell others that you gave to a needy person. Do not tell others about how you give to your favorite charity. Do not place yourself into a position where you have to tell others what you gave and how much you gave. Here our Lord is not talking about the IRS. He is talking about your family members, your friends, your colleagues, and associates. Make sure that they do not find out what you have given nor to whom you have given it.

Do not drop in casual conversation how you cannot do this or that because you don't have enough money for it because you gave it away to this or that charity or to this or that person. Do not give a large amount of money in the offering plate and then make sure that your number is registered so that the Stewardship Board knows what a big giver you are. Do not make sure that pastor knows what a big giver that you are. Do not make sure that the congregational treasurer knows what a big giver you are. If at all possible, give anonymously. Make sure that no one in the pew next to you knows how much you put in.

Do not bring up subjects that you know will lead to you having to talk about how much you have given. Do not tell stories in which you reveal how much you have given. And do not bring such stories with the caveat, "Now, I'm not telling this story so as to brag." If you start a story that way, then your purpose is to brag even though you have said your purpose is not to brag. If you really didn't want to brag, you wouldn't have told the story at all.

If you do give in such a way that other people find out about it, then you are seeking your reward from the people that find out about it. You are seeking your reward from their admiration of your wealth. You are seeking a reward from those who are dependent upon you by reminding them of what they owe you and how much power you have over them. You are seeking their obedience or compliance when you want something done your way. When you make sure that other people know about your generosity you are seeking a reward from them. You want a good reputation with them.

If you do not tell anyone what you have given and make sure that you are not in a position where you will have to talk about how much you have given, then it is clear that you are not seeking a reward from people. You are seeking your reward from your Father in heaven. Such a person who does not reveal what he has given or to whom he has given it reveals that he believes in his Father in heaven and that his Father in heaven will reward what is right. If that is in this life, so be it. If that is at the resurrection so be it. It will be right.

If you seek your treasure with people, then your heart is with people. Your mind is set on earthly things. If your treasure is with your Father in heaven, then your heart is with your Father in heaven. Your mind is set on things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Do not attend the Divine Service in order to be seen by people.

Do not pray in order for other people to see you praying. Do not perform an act of piety in order for other people to see your act of piety. Do not attend the Sacrament of the Altar so that other people may see you go up to the Sacrament of the Altar and see how religious you are.

Do not try to improve the Divine Service so that other members of the congregation may stand around and thank you for the improvements that you made to the Divine Service. Do not try to be the hero of the congregation who brings all of the answers to all of the problems that the congregation has in order to be praised by them. If you do, you have received your reward in full already. You will receive nothing from your Father in heaven because you did not seek your reward from Him. You sought your reward from people. You wanted their praise, not His. You wanted their acclamations, not His. You wanted influence among people not with Him. You wanted to persuade people not be faithful to Him. You wanted praise for yourself and not praise for Him.

Do not attend the Divine Service as if God owes you something for doing so. Do not attend the Divine Service and expect that the congregation owes you something for doing so. Do not use your attendance at the Divine Service as leverage on the other members of the congregation by threatening to quit the Divine Service unless the congregation does things your way.

If you quit the Divine Service under such circumstances it means that you were seeking your praise from people the whole time. You were not at the Divine Service for your Father in heaven. You were there for yourself. You have received your reward in full.

The hypocrites love to go to the Divine Service in order to be seen by others. They will make sure that they wear their fanciest clothes in order to be seen by others. They love for people to see them go to Holy Communion and they want others to know that they were there.

When you attend the Divine Service, sit in the back. That should be good news for many of you. What I mean is, do not make a show of attending the Divine Service. Do not make sure that certain people knew that you were there. Go every time the Divine Service is offered without using it as leverage to get your way in your life. When your Father in heaven sees that you are attending the Divine Service for Him and not for anyone else, He will reward you with His reward. You are thinking about things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. You are not concerned about earthly things.

When you attend the Divine Service in order to be noticed by other people it demonstrates to God that you are seeking your reward among people. It means that the opinion of people or the ability to get what you want from people is your treasure. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. But if you attend the Divine Service purely for the sake of your Father in heaven and you go even when the music isn't up to par or the preaching isn't entirely inspiring, then your Father in heaven knows that you are there for Him. He knows and you know that your treasure is with Him. And where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Now folks, I know that there are many reasons why you would go to the Divine Service or why you would give to those less fortunate than yourselves. I know that it is not only for show. I know that you give in order to show love. I know that you come to the Divine Service in order to learn more about God. I realize those things. But doing these things in order to be seen by others should not be a reason at all. It does not have to be the main reason in order for you to commit idolatry. It can simply be one reason among many and the fact that you want to be seen by others or you want them to know the good that you did shows God the Father where your treasure is. And where your treasure is there your heart will be also.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.