

Ash Wednesday - What Is Truly Important

Matthew 6: 19-33

WHAT is truly important? That is a question we all have to deal with at some point or points in our lives. What sparked this line of thinking for me was an odd juxtaposition in the paper this past Monday. On the front page were several articles recounting the devastation and attendant difficulties in the wake of tornadoes - death, destruction. We knew. But on the inside of the paper, in the business section, was a story that told of a businessman, a Connecticut contractor, whose specialty is homes for the super rich. It talked about a plywood box marked "**Fragile**" that contained a 5,000 pound antique bathtub carved from a single block of marble which will sit in the master bathroom of this \$7-million house - 20,000 square feet, five-car garage, matching 16' x 12' walk-in closets for husband and wife. The builder went on to say that this is nothing unusual - thousand-dollar door hinges, \$10,000 gold-plated faucets, custom-made cabinets, even in the laundry room, are common in homes like these. Conspicuous consumption written LARGE. As I read I thought, "**Who will give a rip when that house gets wiped out in a tornado?**"

It reminded me of the two fellows who were talking about the demise of a rich neighbor. One asked the other, "**How much did he leave?**" And the friend responded, "**All of it**".

The scripture that jumped to mind was the passage we read from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' words about "**stuff**". Listen to this translation by Eugene Peterson in The Message: Remix:

"Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or – worse- stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is. Is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. "

At the end of the War between the States, during the cleanup of a battlefield, this quote was found in the Bible of a freed slave who had died in the battle. It was a prayer that I have adopted as my own:

"Lord, I ain't what I oughta be,

And I ain't what I wanna be,

And I ain't what I gonna be.

But Lord, I thank ya, I ain't what I was."

This *question* of what IS truly important is not new to you. In fact, I am equally sure that the answer is not new to you either. But in a society such as ours that places such a premium on the accumulation of "stuff", the marble bathtubs and \$7-million houses, we need the occasional reminder to help us keep perspective. If there is any idolatry that is rampant in American society, it is this idolatry of "stuff".

If it is any consolation, the problem is not new. The folks who heard Jesus on that Judean hillside had the same problem. Jesus said do not worry about "stuff" - God knows what you need and will provide for you just as the birds of the air are fed and the lilies of the field are dressed. And if God will take care of the birds and flowers so well, think how well YOU will be taken care of.

"What it boils down to is this:" Jesus went on, **"if you are going to be concerned about anything, it should be to see that the things that are important to God are equally important to you. Then you can be absolutely confident that everything else that you need will be taken care of."** Or as the King James Version of the Bible in which we were all nurtured has it, Matthew 6: 33 ***"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."***

I knew a man whose whole life was firmly grounded upon that promise. He was a minister. He never worried. His attitude was, **"God has always provided enough so far; I know He always will."**

What is TRULY important to you? Not "stuff" I hope. We have been reminded too graphically lately that "stuff" can be gone in a flash...or a flash flood. Jesus says, ***"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,"*** or in a more modern rendering, **"Make God's priorities YOUR priorities,"** then everything else will fall into place.

Eugene Peterson phrased it this way in **The Message: Remix:**

“Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human needs will be met”.

THAT is what is truly IMPORTANT.

Pastor Larry Smith 02-06-08