

## “Unfailing Treasure”

Rev. David Gregory

August 7, 2022

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost



### Readings

Luke 12:29-34

from the New Revised Standard Version

And do not keep seeking what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that seek all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

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.

David Whyte

in *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*

Giving is a difficult and almost contemplative art form that has to be practiced to be done well; to learn to give is almost always the simple, sometimes heartbreaking act of just giving again. To stop giving in any situation is to call an end to relationship. Giving is an essence of existence, and a test of our character; it asks deep questions about our relationship to others, to ourselves and strangely, to time itself: all gifts change with the maturation of their recipients.

To give well, appropriately and often is to establish a beautiful seasonal symmetry between the urgency within us that wishes to be generous, and the part of the world that is suddenly surprised and happy to receive. To give generously but appropriately and then, most difficult of all, and as the full apotheosis of the art, with feeling, in the moment and spontaneously, has always been recognized as one of the greatest of human qualities.

*From you I receive, to you I give;  
Together we share, and from this we live.*

We have embarked upon a new season of ministry together in this place. It may not be what we expected, nor is it what we planned for, but it is here; it is upon us; we are in it ... together. One of the standards contained in our ministerial covenant, or the document/contract containing our agreements to the “terms of call” that we agreed upon four and a half years ago, is a ninety-day notice period. In most other vocations this might seem like an excessive amount of time for a lame duck to waddle around quacking. But as I learned decades ago, my particular vocation is not like the others. If there comes a time, for example, when a church decides it is time for its minister to move along, or if the minister senses a shift in calling, it becomes clear that this ninety-day period is in place for some very good reasons.

First of all, we need time: time to adjust, time to heal, time to communicate, to discern and to make some new plans. The new plans are in the hands of the Governing Board and the new leadership that will be in place, so you will find my conversations with you to be of a different quality. I am moving into a bigger picture at the moment, and you’ll hear me speaking in more general terms about the movement of the wider church in the wider world, and less about what I think CCC should do about this or that or the other thing.

You’ve been listening to me talk (and talk and talk and talk) for these last years, and most of you have few questions about what I think. I’ve had the luxury of these moments each Sunday, week after week, year after year, when I talk and you listen. One of the blessings of the pandemic era is that we’ve had more opportunity for you to talk to one another. Love them or hate them, these occasional breakout groups have been a vehicle for greater interaction, deeper intimacy, and more open communication than we had practiced before. And because of that, we experience stronger bonds between and among than many churches who have simply been streaming whatever was going on in their chancel.

The future plans for this local church are now primarily in the hands of people other than me, but this does not mean that my work is finished. In these next weeks I still have the work of adjustment, of healing, of communication, and discernment. And to that end, the month of September will be a strongly focused time period. In preparation for this time, you may have noticed that the Friday update this week included an invitation to a virtual summit entitled “The Future of Christianity,” presented by the Center for Action and Contemplation, including speakers Brian McLaren, Richard Rohr, Barbara Holmes and James Finley. This online experience is being offered on August 23rd from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Pacific. All the registration information is in your Friday email. The cost is on a sliding scale beginning at \$10 to make this event more accessible to everyone. I will be following this event up with a four-week book discussion on Brian McLaren’s book *Do I Stay Christian? A Guide for the Doubters, the Disappointed, and the Disillusioned*. This series is free of charge and will be conducted on Zoom each Wednesday beginning September 7th from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. To register, just email me or send me a text so I know you’re coming. The link will be available to all. Why are we doing this? To answer that question, I’ll quote from the message you received on Friday.

*We live in a time of widespread uncertainty about the future of Christianity. If you have ever felt conflicted about the religion's history of violence, prejudice, and domination — know that you are not alone.*

*Considering the unprecedented crises our world faces, we urgently need to find a new way of being in the world together that bridges difference and embodies the reality of all life as sacred and connected.*

*In that spirit, the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) invites you to join us for a **virtual discussion** on the current state and future of the Christian religion, featuring CAC faculty members **Brian McLaren, Barbara Holmes, James Finley, and Richard Rohr.***

*This work invites each of us to play a part — a whole body, a whole community, a whole movement grounded in shared vision, values, and experiential knowing of God's presence. We are called to show up in the world together.*

In other words:

*From you I receive, to you I give;  
Together we share, and from this we live.*

These are of course the words from one of our favorite chants here at CCC, and they encapsulate the energy of today's gospel reading. We live in a mode of receptivity, and the act of receiving places us in the flow of giving. Life is inhaling and exhaling. We inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Our plant friends do roughly the opposite in the process of photosynthesis. From them we receive, to them we give, and it is the perfect metaphor for Jesus' teaching about releasing our resistance/anxiety to fully receive ... then fully give. It's also a great metaphor for our pastor/parish relationships within the church. For the last four and a half years we've had this opportunity to give and receive. Speaking for myself and for Tripp, the flow of this energy has changed our lives forever. As we contemplate our return to the state of New York after nearly five years, we are not the same people. We have been drinking deeply from a vast well of Wisdom and Spirit. "Together we share, and from this we live."

But there is a broader inhaling and exhaling that is taking place, within society and culture. It involves the movement of faith and wisdom traditions of many kinds, and we're being called upon to step up and own the ways in which our traditions have done damage in the past and the ways we can share our unending treasures in the future. This is the important work that we will do between now and October 16<sup>th</sup>, which will be our final service together.

Nearly five years ago we began a theoretical process of preparation for a New Reformation. It felt as though we were dipping one little toe at a time into a cold swimming pool, but the process was apparently too gradual. Suddenly we were shoved head first into this shocking sea of change. The thing about a cold swimming pool is that once you're in it, it's still cold, but you begin to adapt. You begin to swim, and as you swim, you find out that it isn't so bad after all. I invite you on this journey for the next couple of months. I think it will create some context for all that will come after. And in the midst of it, I think we're gonna have some fun! Come on in! The water's fine!