

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from May 25, 2008

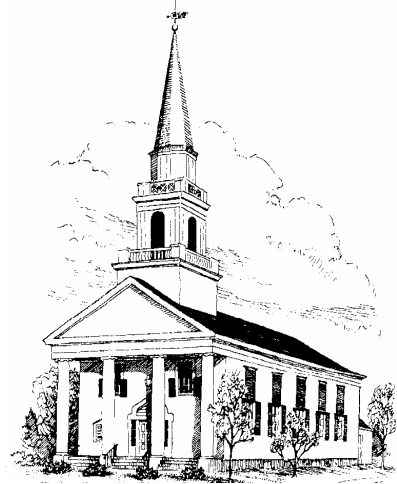
Rev. Barbara J. Libby

“How’s Your Heart Vision?”

Scriptures:

Isaiah 49:8-16a

Matthew 6:24-34



When we read the Gospels, we often are invited to wrestle with some of the deepest truths about God, about ourselves, and about the world around us. Today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew is no exception.

Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter in today's text. Jesus invites us to look at the impossibility of serving two masters at the same time. Jesus suggests it is impossible to serve “two Gods” (as our contemporary translation puts it) at the same time. We who live here in Connecticut, one of the wealthiest states in the country, are familiar with the challenge of having wealth and trying to be people of faith. Someone has said, *the best things in life aren't things*. Yet, oh how our culture and the advertising world works hard to convince us otherwise.

I imagine we've all seen the images of folks in both China and Myanmar in recent weeks—countries devastated by earthquake and by the cyclone and people are simply struggling to survive. Their lives have been pared down to the barest of minimums. Even now, many, many lives hang in a precarious balance between life and death—without shelter, without food, without clean water to drink, subject to all matter of disease and epidemic.

Jesus invites us here today to think about our vision—not the vision of our physical eyes, rather the ability of our hearts to really see. Jesus invites us to consider whether we have the ability in our hearts to see what is real, what is true, what is worthy of our attention.

As a Jewish wisdom teacher, Jesus valued the orientation of the heart above all else. The heart was thought to be the very center of our being. For a human being in the 1st century and maybe we, here in the 21st century, have finally come back around to understanding the importance of our hearts as central to our focus on what's vital.

I do not hear Jesus saying something like “Don't worry. Be happy.” Rather I hear a real concern for the fundamental direction of the center of our being wherever we may believe that center lies. I hear Jesus saying, *If our focus is only on what we will eat, or what we will wear, or how we will spend our money, then our hearts are not focused on what is truly important*. I hear Jesus saying, *If our focus is only on the details of our human lives then our vision will be fore-shortened and incomplete*. *Instead, our focus needs to be on God. Our focus needs*

to be on God-realities, God-initiatives, God-provisions.

Peterson's translation suggests that Jesus says to us today, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now." So, perhaps, the question for each of us here today is:

What is God doing right now, right here, today in my life?

What is God doing for the Mystic Congregational Church right now, right here, today?

What is God doing for the Search Committee?

What is God doing for the candidates applying here?

Today's lesson invites us to let go of the anxiety about our lives. Let go of our anxiety and, instead, focus on trust. Folks working through the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have an important reminder for this very thing: *Let go and let God!* It's a good reminder of something we all need to do—*Let go and let God!*

Of course we can spend time and energy worrying and fretting about what we perceive as problems. Of course we can spend time and energy worrying and fretting about today and tomorrow and the next day and what they might hold for us. Of course we can use our time and energy just trying to cope with all of the challenges life hands us on a daily basis. And there's no doubt that, for some of us, life hands us more than enough to worry about.

The Greek term for "anxiety" can be translated as "split attention" or "divided concern." When we are anxious or fretting, our attention is distracted. Our attention is divided. Our heart's vision can not be at its best when we are anxious and troubled. When our attention is divided or split we are less than focused, we do not see or function at our best.

Anxiety can use up a lot of energy; it can usurp our time. Anxiety does not feed our soul. Anxiety prevents us from centering our attention. Anxiety prevents us from centering our heart's vision on God. Anxiety prevents us from trusting God.

Hopefully everyone got a penny as you came into worship today. Can you take out that coin for a minute? Take it out & listen to this story: Several years ago, a friend of mine and her husband were invited to spend the weekend with her husband's boss at his home. My friend, Arlene, was nervous about the weekend. The boss was very wealthy, with a fine home on the waterfront. She discovered that the boss was a very generous host and took them to the finest restaurants.

On the second evening, the three of them were entering an exclusive eatery when the boss stopped suddenly, bent down to the pavement and picked up a coin. Silently the boss held up the coin. It was a penny and he smiled broadly. Then he put the coin into his pocket as if he had found a great treasure. Arlene thought to herself: *How absurd! What need did this man have for a single penny?* She wondered why he even bothered to stop and pick it up?

Throughout dinner, the episode kept nagging at her. Finally, she could stand it no longer. She casually mentioned that her daughter once had a coin collection and she asked the boss if the penny he had found had been of some value, to be added to his collection. A smile gradually crept over the man's face as he reached into his pocket for the penny and held it out

for her to see. She had seen many pennies before. She wondered what was the point?

He invited her to "Look at it and read what it says."

Well, first she read the words *United States of America*.

He said, "No, not that. Read further."

"One Cent?"

"No, keep reading," he said.

"In God We Trust?"

"Yes!" he exclaimed.

"And?" she said with growing impatience...

Her host continued, "If I truly trust in God, then even the name of God is holy, even on a coin. Whenever I find a coin, I see that inscription. It is written on every single United States coin, but we rarely seem to notice it. God drops a message right in front of me reminding me to trust God. Who am I to pass it by? So whenever I see a coin, I stop and pray and check to see if my trust is truly in God at that moment. I pick the coin up as a response to God. The coin reminds me each time to trust in God. And for that short moment, I try to cherish it as if it were gold. I think it is God's way of starting a conversation with me. Lucky for me, God is patient and pennies are plentiful!"

How would it be if we went home this week and placed this penny in a place where we will see it throughout the week. When we happen upon this or any penny, let's remember to read those words "In God We Trust". Let's remember: pennies are plentiful and God is patient.

(Acknowledgement is here made to the sermon seeds of the United Church of Christ's online resource for this Sunday's readings.)

