

Leaving a Legacy

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

In his book, Who Switched the Price Tags, Dr. Tony Campolo mentions a survey of 50 people over the age of 95 who were asked one question. “If you could live your life again, what would you do differently?” Most responses fell into three categories:

- 1) Reflect more. People said they would stop and ponder things they had taken for granted. They would live more in the moment and take time to smell the roses.
- 2) Risk more. People said they would take more risks instead of living a safe and calculated life. They would break out of the security of their routines and seek new adventures.
- 3) Leave a legacy. People said they would do more things that would live on after they died. They would do a better job of leaving a lasting impact.

Since I retired two years ago, I’ve been reflecting on my legacy. What am I leaving behind? What will family members and friends say about me at my memorial service? What words will be etched on my gravestone over at the cemetery? How will the treasures of my heart make a difference in this church’s future ministry and mission?

Oseola McCarty used her heart’s treasure to leave a legacy. She was an African-American woman from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She left school after the sixth grade to take care of a sick relative, then went to work as a washerwoman. For seventy-five years McCarty washed, ironed and folded the laundry of bankers, lawyers, and doctors in town. She earned just pennies, put away whatever she could, and eventually started a little savings account at the bank.

McCarty lived a simple life. Her treasures on earth were few. She lived in a modest frame house near the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi. She never owned a car and walked a mile to and from the grocery store. On Sundays she went to the Friendship Baptist Church, carrying a Bible held together with Scotch tape.

When she was eighty-seven with hands gnarled by arthritis, McCarty had to retire. She began to put her affairs in order and decide what she wanted to do with the little she accumulated. In 1995, the development office of the University of Southern Mississippi received a phone call from the bank. They had a check for the school from Oseola McCarty - a check for \$150,000. No one at the college had ever heard of her. She had never set foot on the campus. This washer woman who had never been to high school, let alone college, gave away virtually every dollar she made for a minority students scholarship.

The gift made front-page headlines. In an interview before she died, she was asked why she did not spend the money she had earned on herself. Oseola smiled and said, "I am spending it on myself."

Reflecting on her comment, a Presbyterian pastor said, "I do not know exactly what Jesus had in mind when he said that we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven; but I suspect that Oseola McCarty knew." (Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew)

What do you treasure? What do you value? What legacy will you leave? Show me your treasure, Jesus says, and I will show you your heart.

Presbyterian author Tom Long says: "What our hearts really desire, of course, is to count - to count for something and to count to someone. To come to the end of the day - or the end of a life - with the satisfaction of having stood for what is good, with the joy of having been loved and having loved well in return, and with the peace of having walked with God - these are the true treasures, the treasures of the kingdom, a fortune no thief can plunder."

Each of us has to decide what we want to do with our heart's treasure. Each of us leaves a legacy in this life. The question is what kind?

Usually, we think of a legacy as a bequest of money or property passed on to family or an institution through a will. During my time as your pastor, this church was blessed with two such legacies.

In 2014 we received a bequest from Bill Turner who had been a member and church officer forty years ago. Bill moved here to be the superintendent of the schools. He had been a Baptist, but didn't feel at home at the local Baptist church. So, he and his wife visited our church and got converted. The Turners were heavily invested in this congregation and community. They raised money for and worked on this sanctuary addition when it was built. Bill along with Emmett Cart made our famous crooked cross from a tree on the property. Eventually Bill and his wife retired and moved to Ruidoso. The former Baptist was known as Mr. Presbyterian at First Church there. Bill left this church a \$10,000 legacy gift. It came a very crucial time and helped us financially for over two years.

Between 2017 and 2019, Betty Brown blessed us with three bequests. Betty and Ed had a home in Horseshoe Springs and were close friends of Dick and DH Ford. Ed was wounded in WWII and the doctors didn't think he would live for more than five years. During his hospital stay, he and Betty got married and were together for 59 years. They moved to Albuquerque after the war, adopted and raised two sons, and became active members of First Presbyterian.

In their retirement, they spent a lot of time here in Jemez and were involved in this church. Ed served as elder and clerk of session. Betty served as a deacon and was known for her knitted animals. Ed was wheel chair bound because of his war injury, but that didn't slow him down. I'm convinced he's the reason our facility is handicap accessible. The Browns left us a total of almost \$44,000 in their legacy gift. Over the years, it has helped us pay for new hymnals, support Beverly, start a youth group, plus other expenses related to music and education.

A legacy is a gift for the future. It is something tangible we leave to impact the people who come after us. Earlier this year, I volunteered to serve on our church's Forward in Faith Team along

with Diane, Barb and Shannon. We're planning to raise funds to ensure this church's financial future.

When I became your pastor over 20 years ago, we had \$110,000 in the bank. No doubt, a lot were legacy gifts from previous generations. The money accumulated over many years when the church was served by guest preachers and temporary pastoral relationships. In 2002, you called and installed me as your pastor, the first one in over 100 years.

The church's \$110,000 legacy funds were used over the next 20 years to pay for our ministry and mission expenses including your pastor. Right now, there's about \$20,000 left of those original funds. We want to raise new funds to ensure this church can continue to have a pastor and impact this community in the years ahead.

We're going to launch a Forward in Faith campaign as part of our 145th Anniversary next year. Our dream is to raise \$145,000 over the next three years. We are going to reach out to everyone who has ever had a relationship with this church and ask them to give. More information and giving opportunities will be coming in the near future. So, start praying about how you can leave a legacy like Bill Turner or Betty and Ed Brown.

Even though I have emphasized the financial aspect of leaving a legacy, I want you to know that it's about more than just money. It's about what we treasure, what we value, what we pour our hearts into. You see, no matter our age or income or situation in life, each of us is creating a legacy in what we do and say, in who we help and in where we invest ourselves. What kind of legacy are you leaving?

Mr. Holland's Opus is a 1995 movie about a frustrated composer in Portland, Oregon, who takes a job as a high school band teacher in the 1960s. Glenn Holland played by Richard Dreyfuss believes his school job is only temporary. His lifelong goal is achieving critical fame as a classical musician.

Mr. Holland is determined to write an opus, and composes at his piano after putting in a full day at school. But his family demands increase after he discovers their infant son is deaf. The pressures of work and family multiply. Mr. Holland realizes his dream of leaving a lasting musical legacy is wishful thinking.

At the end of the movie, we find older Mr. Holland fighting in vain to keep his job. The school board decided to reduce the budget by cutting the music program. No longer a reluctant band teacher, Mr. Holland believes in what he does and passionately defends the role of arts in public education. What began as a career detour became a thirty-five-year mission where he poured his heart into the lives of young people.

After school ends for the summer, Mr. Holland returns to his classroom to retrieve his belongings. With regret and sorrow, he fills a box with heart treasures from being a teacher. His wife and son arrive to give him a hand.

As they leave the room and walk down the hall, Mr. Holland hears some noise in the auditorium. School is out, so he opens the door to see what's happening. He is surprised to see an auditorium full of former students, teaching colleagues and a banner that reads "Goodbye, Mr. Holland."

They greet Mr. Holland with a standing ovation while a band of past and present members play tunes they learned under his hand. His wife, who's in on the surprise, approaches the podium and makes small talk until the master of ceremonies, the governor of Oregon, arrives. The governor is a former student Mr. Holland helped to believe in herself his first year of teaching.

As she addresses the room of well-wishers, she speaks for the hundreds who are there: "Mr. Holland had a profound influence in my life and on a lot of lives. Yet I get the feeling that he considers a great part of his life misspent. Rumor has it he was always working on this symphony of his and this was going to make him famous and rich. But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous. At least not outside our little town. So, it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. And he would be wrong. Because I think he achieved a success far beyond riches and fame."

Looking at Mr. Holland the governor gestures with a sweeping hand and continues, "Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life."

Show me your treasure, says Jesus, and I will show you your heart. Each of us is leaving a legacy in this life. What will your legacy be?

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David Whiteley, Pastor Emeritus

Jemez Springs Community Presbyterian Church