

Sermon, February 27, 2022
Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-43
“A Fresh Vision: Seeing Life in a Different Way”
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Sylvia Bloom lived a quiet, unassuming life. An unremarkable life. In fact, it's probably safe to assume that none of you, before this morning have ever even heard her name. I was unacquainted with her name, as well, until this week.

We can, perhaps, be forgiven for not knowing her name. She lived with her husband in a small rent controlled apartment in New York City. He was a fireman who taught school sometimes. They never had children. She was well known for being frugal in her lifestyle. She refused to pay for taxi cabs. On 9/11, she walked across the Brooklyn Bridge and waited to take a subway to get home. That's pretty frugal. Perhaps her most remarkable feat was her longevity in her job. She worked as the secretary at a law firm on Wall Street for 67 years. That's a long time to have a job, even one you love.

A most unremarkable life indeed. Or so everyone thought until Sylvia died. Sylvia died in 2016, and when she died, it was revealed she had accumulated over nine million dollars. Let me say that again, nine million dollars. Even her husband knew nothing about it.

How did she do it? She began her job in an era when secretaries also took care of their bosses personal lives and took care of their personal business. When the bosses bought stock, they had her make the purchase. So whenever they made a large purchase she made a purchase of the same stock herself, albeit a smaller number because of her secretary salary.

Apparently, she invested well. Nine million dollars. By the way, her strategy, while I'm sure she wasn't aware of this, bordered on insider trading, and while it may not have been illegal, it was skirting the legal line. Just as a warning to anyone who could be in the same situation.

But the legality isn't the issue. The issue is this woman and her husband lived on next to nothing all their lives. Who knows how often they may have had stress over how to pay a bill or how often they didn't go on vacation, didn't enjoy life all the while she had a fortune, unbeknownst to her husband, in the bank. It was a treasure wasted.

She's not alone, though. The article I read mentioned others who had lived close to the poverty line yet it was revealed they had fortunes they never touched. There's Donald and Mildred Othmar who lived on very little. When they died, it was revealed they had 750 million dollars. Yes, \$750 million. It turns out when they were just starting out, they had this friend named Warren Buffet who was willing to help them invest their money. There was a secretary in Chicago who left 7 million she made off of a single 180 dollar investment she made in the 1930's. So what's the lesson in all of this? If you know of an older secretary who lives frugally, it might be worth your while to be very, very nice to them. You never know.

Well, there might be a greater lesson in all of this. I want to bring your attention to what first caught my eye, the title of the article. "This woman was worth nine million dollars when she died. But no one ever knew, so what's the point?" "Yes she made a lot of money and she is being praised now, but at what cost?" Good questions. It's not about notoriety or everyone looking at you or praising you because you are rich. It's about being the type of person who has the world at their fingertips yet never enjoying it. What's the point of having a treasure if you never enjoy it or never use it? In a way, while the stories are interesting, isn't there something tragic about having everything but never enjoying it or making anyone else's life a bit easier?

What would you do? If you had a treasure, a treasure beyond measure, richness beyond calculating, would you hide it, would you put it away and live as if you were a pauper, or would you enjoy the riches and use them to make your life and the life of others better.

Or we could ask the question that way, how do you see the riches in your life? What is your vision for the treasure you have been given? We are in our fourth week of our series on having a vision. Our hope as the church seeks God's vision for us is that you would begin to seek God's vision for all the aspects of your life. Consider it a bit of pre-Lent introspection, if you will. When it comes to how we see our treasure, so often we are like the people we talked about a few moments ago, or like Peter in our Gospel Lesson.

Peter, James, and John are the witnesses to the transfiguration of Jesus. It's a moment when, just for the briefest of moments, Jesus shed just a little bit of His humanity and we see the glory of God, the glory of Jesus, the son of God eternal begotten. James and John are stuck dumb, but Peter has never been stuck dumb in his life. He is always willing to say what's on his mind and heart. Peter says, this is incredible, let's just stay here. Look, I'll build some shelters, and you and Moses and Elijah and us, we can just stay here all together. James and John look at each other and slowly step away from Peter.

Now that's about as cringe worthy a statement as you will ever hear from Peter, and that's saying something. But we get where he is coming from. He has just experienced the glory of God, Moses and Elijah. Jesus in all of His glory, and Peter just wants to stay there. He wants to bathe in this treasure of this glory and just keep it to himself. Lets' just stay here.

But what's the point of having a treasure if you never use it? What's the point if you never use it to make a difference in anyone's life. They had it all, but what's the point. Yes, they could stay there on the mountain, but what about the people in the valley? The other disciples? What good is a treasure if no one ever sees it or uses it?

So, let me ask you again, what will you do with your treasure? Of course, the first thing we must do is realize we actually have a treasure. You know, some of those folks we talked about may never have known what they had. Invested something years ago, and never looked at it again. Do you know the treasure you have? Are you aware of the riches you have been given? Scripture says you have been called a child of the most high God. That our heavenly Father loves you so much that He will hold no good thing in heaven from you. That you hold His inheritance? The power of the Holy Spirit has been given to you. Jesus says the miracles I have done will not compare to what My disciples will do in My name. What are you doing with your treasure?

Once you know you have this treasure, you need to use it. It pains me to see so many Christians live as if they are spiritual paupers. As if God can't meet their need, as if He can't change their situation, as if He can't give them freedom, as if He can't break the power of a sin in their lives, as if He can't break the hold of our past or our mistakes. As if the mountains can't move in front of us.

Spiritual poverty is not your inheritance. Stop living as if it is. Allow the Holy Spirit to transform your life, let Him set you free, let Him show you the possibilities of living as a child of His kingdom, allow God to give a fresh vision of what He can do and will do in your life. You are spiritually rich, begin to live like it. Our God is a lavish God. Allow him to bless you.

And learn to be generous. The church, meaning us, is not here for our own benefit. We're not called into existence for us. We are here to change the lives of those living in darkness. Who are poor. Who are paupers. How can it be that we who have the good news do so little to change the lives of people around us? Make a difference in someone's life? Tell them about Jesus, pray for them, ask God to bless them. Who do you know right now who is living in spiritual poverty? Bitter, unloved, unsure of the future? Will you let them know of God's love, will you share the riches of His grace, what will you do with the treasure God has given you?

Amen.