

*THE TREASURE THAT LASTS*

*Matthew 6:19-21*

<sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It was a cool Brooklyn morning back in March of 1929 as young Arthur stood before the altar of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. At 13, after several years of intensive study, he was now ready to declare his faith before the congregation. The class spoke together the words of their confession. It began with the Apostles Creed, and continued with several questions about the doctrine they had been taught in Confirmation class. And finally it ended with these two declarations.

"Do you also, as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" "I do so intend, with the help of God," Arthur answered.

And finally, said the pastor, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the rule of the divine word, to walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death? "I do so intend by the grace of God."

The class walked forward, one by one, and received their individual blessing and Bible verse from Pastor Riedel. A few more prayers were spoken. The right hand of fellowship was offered along with a few words of welcome. Another hymn was sung. A few more prayers. And the service was over. And out Arthur walked into the world.

Before him lay a future. Before him lay 60 more years of life. Before him lay days of joy and days of sorrow; days of gladness and days of pain; days to remember and days to forget. But what could possibly know what would happen as they walked out that door on that day? Who could know what kinds of challenges they would face?

Did Arthur know that within months the Great Depression would hit, the stock market would crash, and he would have to give up his full education to become a breadwinner for the family? No.

Did Arthur know that within a decade, a second World War would be fought and that he would have to give up years of his life in service to his country? No.

Did Arthur know that he would spend most of his life working as a mechanic in a factory? Did he know that he would never be rich and virtually always have to scrimp and save to afford the things he wanted for his family? No.

Did Arthur know that he would marry, that he would father six children, that he would have 14 grandchildren? Did he know that one of his children would die in infancy, that one of his daughters would struggle with cancer, that two of his sons would become pastors, and that all of his children would marry? No.

Did Arthur know that he himself would become ill - that, at age 70 he would be diagnosed with kidney cancer, suffer a debilitating 3 years of pain, have a heart attack, and lie on his deathbed nearly 60 years, to the day, after he made this confession of faith? No.

No, certainly not. None of us knows the course of our future. None of us can even predict what tomorrow has in store. And many would say that because of this fact -- that vows are a thing of the past -- that we can never commit ourselves to anyone or anything. There are too many variables -- too many changing circumstances and emotions and feelings.

It's like the shifting sands of a desert. Today's hill is tomorrow's valley -- today's mounds are tomorrow's holes. Or the waves in the ocean -- the crests -- the zeniths -- the high points -- they stay there only for a moment, and then they crash onto the shore.

Yes, many would throw up their hands and say, I can't devote myself to anything -- I can't claim allegiance to anyone -- because tomorrow I may feel differently and my circumstances might change. The future's triumph or tragedy may transform my whole life.

But young Arthur learned something very important in Confirmation class -- something that he never lost in spite of the days of struggle or the times of difficulty. Something that enabled him to make his confession of faith and hold true to his promises. Something that endured. And that something is this:

The love of the God who created us and His commitment to us as His people is the one solid constant in the world that never changes -- the one anchor that holds firm no matter what we experience or what emotions we may encounter.

Through his years of instruction in the Christian faith, Arthur came to know the Lord who stood by His people, over and over and over again -even though they continued to fail -- even though they continued to reject Him -- even though they took His prophets and treated them with dishonor, disrespect, and disgust. Still, God loved. Still God gave. Still God reached out, grasped hold of His people, and refused to let go.

Were we in His shoes, we probably would have thrown in the towel and started all over again -- we probably would have surrendered to the overwhelming evidence that such a people weren't worth it -- didn't deserve it -- couldn't survive; and allowed this sinful race to self-destruct on its own selfish indulgences.

But God's shocking response was the final convincer for Arthur. When He saw God's willingness to walk into our world, to know our temptations, to carry our sin, and to endure our punishment; all so that we might be cleansed and live again. When He saw the picture of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, dying on the cross in our place so that we might have forgiveness and salvation -- that's when he said, "These -- these are the hands in which I will place my soul -- these are the hands which will guide my life -- these are the hands I will trust for my future. And I will never let go of this God. Because there is nothing -- absolutely nothing that could match the kind of love and the firm commitment that He has for me. Every other treasure can fade and fizzle -- every other thing of value can shift like the sands and leave me empty and and depleted -- money, fame, popularity, family, friends, possessions, career. They're all shifting sand. But God --with Him I have the faithful history of unwavering love and unequivocal commitment -- with Him I have a pilot, who will guide and lead me through the confusion and difficulty of this life and into an eternal future. With Him I have a Savior, who died so that I might live and who lives so that I might live forever."

"Yes, with the help of God," said Arthur. "Yes, with the help of God I will continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" "Yes, with the help of God I will faithfully conform all my life to the rule of the divine word,

and walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?"

You see -- Arthur saw the treasure laid before him; and Arthur rejoiced to place his life into the hands of this gracious God who loved so much.

And Arthur did remain faithful. By the grace of God and with His help, he did hold firm even to his end. I can tell you -- 'cause, for those who hadn't figured it out already, Arthur was my dad. And it was his dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ and His commitment to follow Jesus that engendered my own. And I thank God that this quiet, gentle man brought me, week after week to the house of God, so that I, like he, could come to embrace the faith as my own, and see the treasure, and say those words for myself.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ (and especially you who are to be confirmands next Sunday). Today the treasure also stands before you; and you have the opportunity to declare before God and His church, once again, in the words of the Apostles' Creed, your confidence and your commitment to the Savior who brought you life.

There are many voices out there who will tell you that it's foolishness. They will tell you to sink your teeth into the quest for money and the glory of "having things." They will tell you to place all your energies into self-fulfillment and a rewarding career and making a name for yourself. They will tell you that the most valuable thing in life is friends and family and pursuing your dreams.

And it will all sound very good. For it will be couched in terms that sound godly and right. And they will be conveyed in persuasive ways -through television, through advertising, through editorials and corporate moguls and slick-tongued speakers.

But don't be fooled by the glitter and glitz. Don't be charmed by the sparkles and shimmer. Keep your eyes focused, instead, on the real treasure: the one that never fades or fails -- the one that lasts to eternity and guides us into the paths of righteousness. The solid anchor that holds us firm even as the waves around us roar and the winds thunder. Jesus Christ, our Savior.

May God bless you in your confession, may He strengthen you in your convictions, and may He guide you daily into the arms of life. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.