**12 Pentecost, Is 1:1-20, Ps 50, Hebrews 11:1-16, Luke 12:32-40** August 11, 2013**,** Rev Mary S. Trainor

"***Jesus said....Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom***....***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

You may have noticed my treasure on top of my car in the parking lot a couple of times this summer: my green, 25 year old vintage bicycle. Oh, I do love my bike. A few weeks ago, my bike was driven into our garage on top of the car, and totaled: my treasured bike went into the dumpster last week, all twisted.

Today's Gospel reading challenges us to look at what we treasure in our lives, and why. I have a treasure chest with me this morning to aid in our reflection about our treasures. When my children were young, we used to go to a Dentist who had a treasure chest a little bigger than this one. My kids loved to go to the dentist; the excitement of the treasure hunt far outweighed any concern they had about the dentist. As we look in the treasure chest of our lives, we would find things that would not fit into this treasure chest: our recreational equipment, our car, our home, our big person toys. These are all material possessions, and they matter to us. Do you remember way back in 1985 when the song by Madonna called, "Material Girl" was so popular? It had a fast beat, and the chorus went like this: " You know that we are living in a material world, And I am a material girl." It's true; we live in a material world! We are taught by our society that our material possessions are the source of our security and happiness -- but Jesus speaks of riches that are not material, riches that are so much more valuable than material things! ***Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

I have a friend who has nothing in material treasure, yet lives daily rich in spiritual treasures. By our standards, he would be categorized as the poorest of the poor. Nicholas Syano, one of the happiest and most prayerful people I have ever met, came into my life six years ago in Stevens Point. He received a scholarship for a masters degree in natural resources at UWSP, and was recognized as the top student. Nicholas was about 30 then, with a wife and a child on the way; he left them behind in Kenya to attend school here. As the months went by, I learned more and more about Nicholas' life back in Africa and realized what a shock his life in Wisconsin must be for him - not only our winters (for Nicholas had never experienced cold or snow before). You see, Nicholas obtained his first pair of shoes when he was 13. He had to walk barefoot for many miles to attend church school, and then work in the fields full time when he returned home. His home was a bare floor hut, and he and his brothers would have to deal with deadly cobras that would slide into the huts at night; cobras did not scare Nicholas. Now, Nicholas is back home in Kenya as the director of an AIDs orphan village that supports itself with agriculture, and he manages tree planting for sustainability in his poverty-stricken hometown. All these are remarkable facts, but the most remarkable thing is that I never have heard Nicholas complain or really even ask for anything. Some of the most intense, holy prayer times I have ever had were with Nicholas in my office at UWSP. I still communicate regularly with him via email, and all I ever hear is joy and gratitude -- in spite of his daily challenges. Where does Nicholas get his joy from? Here is the answer. Nicholas lives with total faith in the truth of the first line of today's Gospel, "***Jesus said....Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom***." Nicholas' treasure is his faith in God.

Our Epistle today is the famous Scripture on faith. We are given examples from the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Sarah) of people who lived with their faith in God as their treasure. Each of them, like Nicholas has, took risks in their lives that others in their time thought were crazy -- yet these were not risks to them, because they had so much trust in God. It is by faith that they, and we, can venture forward no matter what challenges we face. The Epistle defines faith as, ***"the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***” The treasure of faith is invisible, nothing material. Faith is not some complicated set of sophisticated beliefs, or something we earn. Faith is saying YES to Jesus; accepting the gift of God's love. **Faith** is trusting in God's leading hand. We live in a world of people who live with faith in material things, but they will let us down. The only object of faith will not let you down is Jesus Christ, the only source of inner peace, true joy, real freedom, and abundant life. **Paul says in Ephesians 2: 8: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith****."* This is THE treasure.

Our Gospel ends today with an ominous caution, as it did last week: we are to live today, everyday as though it might be our last. Jesus says, "***You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."*** Be ready to meet Jesus, to breathe your last breath on earth, at any time. Today, we celebrate two baptisms, and in the sacrament of Baptism we die to sin and are born again. Jesus said, "***do not be afraid;***" if we live with faith in God as our primary life's treasure we need not fear being ready. Today, Brixion and Madeline will be sealed as Christ's own forever -- you have been sealed as Christ's own forever. Today is an important reminder for all of us to live into our Baptism. Turn to the Baptismal Covenant on pages 304 and 305 in the BCP. See these words we will all recite in a few minutes. They are words that can be read quickly -- even without thinking. In it we say what we believe in, in it we say how we will live our lives, in it we say what we will treasure. They are a "covenant;" covenant means "promise." So today say these words from your heart with renewed faith. If we do all these things, we are truly living as Jesus directs us to live, and we can live unafraid -- because we know that it is God's good pleasure to give us His love, His kingdom.

Where is your heart? What is the basis of your faith? What is in your life's treasure chest....what is it that you treasure the most? ***Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** We live in a material world, but we know now that the greatest treasures are not material but invisible: God's love. God wants you to live everyday knowing that it is His pleasure to give you the kingdom, the greatest treasures, heavenly riches. You are sealed as Christ's own forever. Amen.