

December 24, 2022 Christmas Eve

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Luke 2:1-20

The Treasure Map

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X marks the spot where great treasure awaits, if we are only willing to follow the clues and make the journey. Treasure maps have been captivating the imagination of children for generations. And, adults as well. Forrest Fenn hid a treasure of gold and precious gems worth two million dollars in the Rocky Mountains. He inspired the imaginations of so many. Countless people pored over his clues and searched over a decade before it was finally found.

Here is another tale of treasure. A woman named Sarah lives in a rundown shack on the outskirts of town. She has been poor for many years. All she has is her tiny, tumbledown trailer and a small scraggly garden behind it. One of her only pleasures is sitting in her garden, on an old white plastic chair and enjoying the sunshine. As she sat there she would offer her prayers of thanksgiving to God.

Over the years, every night when she went to sleep she kept having the same dream. In the dream this voice would speak to her and tell her there was an incredibly valuable treasure to be found under a bridge in a town far, far away. Sarah ignored the dream for years, but it kept rolling around in the back of her mind.

One day she decided to pursue her dream and seek her treasure. After all, she was so very poor. And, as improbable as it seemed, perhaps the long journey would provide her with great wealth. Sarah travelled for many days until she finally reaches the destination in her dreams.

There is the bridge she has seen so many times in her mind. She is filled with trembling excitement at the possibility of what might be found beneath it. But in the next second her dreams are dashed. For some reason there is a security guard by the bridge. Fearing she could get into trouble she hides herself behind a tree and keeps watch. But there is a guard on duty both day and night.

After several days of waiting she does not know what else to do. So, she takes a risk, I mean what did she have to lose? She walks up to the guard and says, "Hello, my name is Sarah, I have had the same dream for many years that there is a treasure buried beneath this bridge." The guard is silent for a moment and just looks at Sarah. She is filled with apprehension. But then the guard breaks the silence with a hearty laugh. "This is the strangest thing," he says. "I have had a dream for many years that a woman seeking treasure would come along and the treasure she seeks is to be found in her very own garden."

At first she is confused, but then Sarah rushes home, covering the distance back in half the time it took to get there. When she gets home she goes right to work, digging up her garden, and lo and behold she unearths the most valuable treasure imaginable.

That story is my version of an ancient Jewish folk tale. It is a story we need to hear on Christmas Eve when we read of Jesus' birth in the gospel of Luke. Have you ever noticed that

all of the pyrotechnics and choral crescendos occur in one location and the birth of Jesus happens in an entirely different location?

The shepherds in the field are nearly blinded by the glory of God. An angel brings the bold and booming pronouncement of "good news of great joy," and the arrival of "a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." And soon the angel is backed by an immense celestial choir praising God.

But where Jesus is born there are no bright lights. Where Jesus is born, there are no proclaiming angels. Where Jesus is born there is no heavenly choir. When the shepherds find their way to the manger, there is only Mary and Joseph and the child. They find the most common sight in all the world, a father and mother gathered around their newborn babe.

The real miracle was not to be found in the otherworldly theatrical production. All of that falderal was only there to point in the direction of where God was entering into the world in humble, human flesh.

We can often make the mistake of assuming that the divine is most likely to be found in the exotic or the dramatic. We can be like Sarah, believing what is most valuable is to be found far away from the daily routines of our lives. We can believe that the sacred and the holy are the opposite of the elements of our everyday living.

But Luke tells a different story. Luke tells a story about the transformation of all physical and metaphysical existence, and where it occurs is without a single spotlight, without any fanfare, with nary a drumroll. The story is one of a mother giving birth to a baby with a father beside her. This

is where the miracle occurs. Stop focusing on the bright lights and heavenly choir, this is how the divine enters into our mortal existence and turns the world upside down. In the birth of a baby, like countless babies for generations before and after.

It is almost a magician's sleight of hand trick. We are so busy watching the hand waving a brightly colored scarf, we do not notice the other hand quietly slipping the rabbit into the hat only to be revealed moments later.

Gathered together in this candlelit sanctuary with our own glorious, heavenly choir it would be easy to think this is the sole location of the holy on this sacred night, or perhaps at the cathedral in the papal city, or in Bethlehem. But the epicenter of the holy is actually to be found as each of us returns to our homes this evening.

Where is our treasure buried? Where is the holy to be most resonantly found? In the places where we live. Jesus Christ did not traverse the distance between infinite being and mortal existence to be found living exclusively at the end of exotic pilgrimages or even solely here in our sanctuary. God, in Jesus Christ, is most abundantly present in the places where we live and breathe, sleep and eat, argue and love, veg out on the couch and shovel the snow.

God did not enter into this world to find a home solely in sacred, set-aside places but in the sacred places of our hearts, and in all the sacred places where we live out the routines of our days. God, in Jesus Christ, is to be found in the most human elements of who we are, from waking to the alarm clock in the morning to the dreams we drift off into at night.

As we worship and give thanks to God this evening, all of the choral music, pomp and circumstance and proclamations are a finger pointing us toward our day to day lives where Jesus Christ is arriving this night. We are receiving a savior born to heal us and reconcile us right where we live.

Let us enjoy the pageantry of this time together and then let us go home to find our Savior, born anew into each of our homes and our lives. To find the most valuable treasure, the only clue we need is to follow our hearts to where we live and where those we love live. Because that is always where our God in Jesus Christ is to be found.

Merry Christmas.

Thanks be to God. Amen.