

Dunbarton Congregational Church
Sunday, September 10, 2006
10:30 a.m.

Rally Day

Treasure

Our fascination with pirates and treasure is endless, isn't it? When I was a girl it was Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Today it's Disney and Depp and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Back then it was Long John Silver, today it's Captain Jack Sparrow. Then it was the *Hispaniola*, today it's the *Black Pearl*. Then it was *Skeleton Island*, today it's *Isla Cruces* (the Isle of Crosses). Even for Jesus, two thousand years ago, the image of hidden treasure is powerful —“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field,” writes Matthew, in Greek the word is they-saow-ROSS, a collection of good and precious things.

We all seek good and precious things don't we? We all harbor secret longings for discovery, for surprise, for a treasure that is worth seeking and when found, is worth all the trouble it took to obtain it. As a Christian and someone who cares deeply about peace, I worry about the world these days, especially as we review where we've come in the five years since 9/11. But more than the world, I think, I have come to worry about life here in America. What constitutes treasure for us? What quest are we on that is worth our very souls?

Some of you know that I made a momentous decision this summer. I resolved to change my life in a radical and transformative way. It has not been easy. What began as an act of self-care has required enormous amounts of self-discipline. This is what I did, I gave up multi-tasking.

This is the truth. Feeling completely overwhelmed and bordering on burnout, I read a study about the physical effects of doing ten things at

once. We know it feels dizzy, but as turns out, it also depletes our energy and damages our health---neuro-biologically. So I quit---cold turkey. No more talking on the phone while reading e-mail while sorting papers while munching a snack while thinking about this week's sermon. No more chatting with Bill while watching CNN while cooking dinner while reviewing the day's mail while petting the cat. I have even gone so far as to give up talk radio in the car. Throw some children into the equation and I know you can come up with your own scenario, yes?

The effect has been astounding. First, my productivity plummeted, or so it felt. Then slowly but surely, I began to feel better. I had more energy. I was more focused. Most importantly, I began to notice where I was going and appreciate what I was doing and enjoy who I was with. So enthusiastic am I about this process I'm thinking about starting a twelve-step group, Multitaskers Anonymous. This is countercultural stuff. It is hard. It is powerful. It is healing.

It's like treasure, hidden in a field, that in the midst of twelve-hour days and back-to-back appointments and long commutes and family responsibilities we trip over quite by accident. Something---maybe even utter exhaustion---convinces us to stoop down and examine this thing. We pause just long enough to hear the Savior's voice, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man sowing a mustard seed," the smallest of seeds produces a bush so tall even birds can nest in it. The Kingdom of heaven is like a woman mixing yeast with a bushel of flour. Even the smallest amount will cause the dough to rise. The kingdom of heaven is like a man searching for fine pearls. When he finds one of great value he sells all he has to own it. The kingdom of heaven is like a net that catches all kinds of fish, good and bad alike. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field that someone found and hid while he ran and sold everything he had to buy that field.

I think many of us found that treasure once. But something happened along the way. We buried it and got sidetracked with a million things to do and our busy schedules and so many commitments and financial pressures and

we just lost it. Maybe we couldn't quite bring ourselves to pay full price for the real estate, maybe we wanted a bargain, maybe we wanted to cut a deal with God, or maybe we waited too long and forgot where it was buried, or maybe we became stubborn and intellectual and refused to believe it was all that great to begin with.

The last night I spent in Ghana with fourteen teens last February was one I will never forget. We had gathered in Jim and Gregg's sitting room to share our closing thoughts about the trip---what we had learned, what we would take with us. The students were eerily quiet. A sense of sadness filled the room. "We don't want to leave, Pastor Cindy." Mike finally spoke for the group. "Why?" I asked incredulously. "We don't want to go back to America, to all the wealth and money and craziness, the schedules and the running around and parents who are too busy and never having enough time. Here in Africa, people just know how to be." I was speechless at the depth of their wisdom.

All summer, as we have worked and planned for this new church year, I have sensed a certain resistance—it is echoed in the words of many, "I'm busy. I'm too busy. I just can't, I'm really busy." And I know that this is true. But I also know that busyness is something we buy into. Listen to what our children are telling us. At the very least, try giving up multi-tasking. Even for a week.

There is something precious and good that is lost when we become too busy for faith, when church life becomes something to fear or dread or fend off. There is soul work to do on this earth. We have a purpose and it's far bigger logging hours on the job. A friend told me recently that three people at her work broke down and wept from too many twelve-hour days and the stress of impending layoffs. We need to stop. Americans work more hours and have less vacation time than any country on earth. We need to stop. Our children are over-programmed and over-scheduled and so are we. We need to stop.

This is what I want to tell you this morning: there is a treasure waiting for you here. Kind people who love you for who you are, a pastor who cares, space to relax and sing and cry and laugh and pray, and most important of all, the Word of God, a way of being in the world revealed to us in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Faith, my friends, is the one decision in your life you will never regret. Let us rejoice in our life together.

Amen.