

Where Is Your Heart? - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, Rev. Adam Hange

The theologian Cornel West has a saying that has stayed with me: "*Justice is what love looks like in public.*" I want to borrow that structure this morning, and add one more line: Generosity is what gratitude — deep trust — and a living hope — look like in public. That's what this season of stewardship is really about. Not so much meeting a proposed budget. Or fundraising towards a goal. But a time to consider: *Where is my heart... and where are our hearts invested? And how do our lives tell that story?* Because while Jesus does talk about money in Matthew 6, the deeper conversation is about the state of one's heart.

The commentary I've been sitting with this week was written by Rev. Daphne Gascot Arias, a theologian from Puerto Rico. She opens it with a powerful image that has stuck with me. There is a tree in Puerto Rico called the *yagrumo*. Its leaves are remarkable: the top side is a deep green, the other a shining silver-white that catches the light. People say you can predict rain by watching the *yagrumo*, because just before a storm, the leaves flip upward, showing their silver side. The tree turns toward the sky in anticipation — not to perform, but to receive. It has, as Rev. Gascot Arias puts it, *un barrunto* — a hunch — that something life-giving is on the way.

But the *yagrumo* also carries another meaning in Puerto Rican culture. To say someone is "like the leaves of the *yagrumo*" is to call them two-faced. One face for public, another in private. The shimmering silver and the deep green have become a symbol of hypocrisy — of pretending to be something we are not. And yet — and this is what moved me — Rev. Daphne remembers seeing the cross draped in *yagrumo* leaves during Holy Week as a child. The silver sides turned upward and outward, shimmering in the light through the sanctuary windows. The same leaves that symbolized hypocrisy, arranged on the cross, became a symbol of resurrection. Of transformation. Of opening ourselves to the light.

The same leaf. Two meanings. Everything depends on what you are turning toward — and why. That image sits at the heart of what Jesus is teaching in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has a word for a particular kind of religious person, and it's not a kind one. He calls them hypocrites. And the hypocrisy he has in mind is very specific: it's not about people who do *bad* things. It's about people who do *good* things for the wrong reasons. They give to the poor — but loudly, visibly, dramatically. They

pray — but at the corner of the busiest intersection they can find. They fast — and then make sure everyone can tell by looking at their face. Jesus says: that's your reward, right there. The applause. The admiration. The knowing glances. You wanted to be seen, and you were. Transaction complete.

It's easy to criticize this. We see performative Christianity in the news almost daily — faith wielded for power, for recognition, for an audience. But Jesus wasn't speaking to outsiders here. He was speaking to his own, from inside his own tradition, about a temptation that lives in every one of us. The *yagrumo* leaf does not turn to deceive. But it can. The same act of generosity — giving, praying, fasting — can flow from a heart genuinely turned toward God, or from a heart turned toward the spotlight. The outward act can look identical. Only the light source differs.

Most of us are not chasing the spotlight. Most of us give quietly, serve quietly, show up quietly. But Jesus is asking something even more searching than *are you seeking publicity?* He's asking: even in the quiet, even when no one is watching — pay close attention to your heart. Because God, Jesus says, is the one who sees in secret. And it is that seeing — not the approval of the crowd, not even our own self-satisfaction — that is the measure of our faithfulness. The answer is not to perform better. The answer is to go deeper.

Six times in this passage, Jesus uses the word *secret*. In scripture, repetition is the author's way of grabbing us by the collar: *pay attention to this*. Six times. And I don't think "secret" means hidden in the sense of shameful or sneaky. Jesus is pointing toward something more like closeness. Authenticity. The place where you are fully yourself. The place where there is no performance because there is no audience. "*Go into your room,*" he says, "*shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place.*"

Rev. Gascot Arias calls this the silver side of ourselves — the receptive, true self, turned not toward the public spotlight, but toward the light of love, hope, and compassion. This is where gratitude and generosity are born. Not in the moment of writing the check, but in that quieter, more interior place where we actually reckon with what we trust, and what we love.

There is a difference, and it matters, between *being seen* and *seeking to be seen*. I think about this when I'm invited to donate to an online fundraiser. You're given the choice: make your gift public, or give anonymously. Have you ever had that moment of pause —

wondering which to click? If I give publicly, it might inspire others to give in a way an anonymous gift wouldn't. But if I'm doing it just to look generous — that doesn't feel quite, either. What to do? I'm not going to tell you what to do. But I will say: that moment of pause is exactly where Jesus is pointing. That's the secret place. That's where the real question lives.

Public generosity is not the enemy. We should see our children watching us give. The church has always been a public witness. But the health of that witness depends entirely on what is happening underneath it — in the secret place of our hearts. When generosity flows from an authentic place — from compassion, care, or gratitude — it naturally points beyond the giver. The *yagrumo* leaf shines only because it reflects the sun. It has no light of its own.

In verse 16, Jesus turns to fasting. *"Don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites."* And then this instruction, which has always charmed me: *"When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face."* This is about integrity. About the alignment between inner life and outer witness. As Rev. Gascot Arias writes: the *yagrumo* tree does not produce two separate leaves — one green, one silver. It is one integrated, multicolored leaf. Both sides benefit from the same light.

Integrity doesn't mean we act the same in every situation. We should be playful at play. We should be tender in times of grief. But the values that ground us — the love, the trust, the orientation toward God — those remain the same in every room we enter. The same person. The same light source. To give, or fast, or pray without show is to declare: *I depend on God, not on the approval of others.* It is to live from the inside out. Near the end of the passage, Jesus says something that sounds simple but cuts all the way down:

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

We tend to reverse this. We say: get your heart right first, and then your giving will follow. But Jesus says it the other way around. Your heart follows your treasure. What you invest in — your time, your attention, your money — trains your heart. It shapes what you love. It calibrates what you notice. This is both a warning and an invitation. A warning because it means our hearts are being formed all the time, whether we're paying attention or not. Every purchase, every hour, every small decision is a quiet act of devotion... to something. The question is simply: *to what?* But it's also an invitation.

Because it means we are not stuck. We can choose our treasure. We can choose what we turn toward. *And our hearts will follow.*

As a congregation — where is our heart turned? I invite you to visit our calendar on our website. Look at how we budget our time and our space. Look at what we actually do, week after week. We open our building and our hearts to people in recovery — people who need a community that will not flinch, that will say *you belong here* when the rest of the world has written them off.

We provide shelter and support for neighbors who have nowhere to go. We are a place where young people find their footing in the story, where families and singles and elders and people on the margins of every margin can sit in the same room and know they are not alone. Our heart is for Hillsboro. For our neighbors, right outside these doors - and on the other side of the globe. That is where our treasure already is. And our hearts have followed.

A pledge is not a transaction. It is not a fee to keep the lights on, though it makes that possible, too. A pledge is a kind of prayer, promise, and declaration, rolled into one. It is you saying: *this is where my heart is. I am aligning my treasure with a people, and a place, and a vision, that I believe matters.*

Every person in this room is in a different situation — different means, different seasons, different pressures. No one here can tell you what is right for you. Only you know that. But I want to invite you, before you decide whether or what to pledge, to sit with the deeper question: *where is my heart already invested? And where do I want it to go?*

We are living in a moment when Christianity is being wielded like a weapon — planting its flag in courthouses and classrooms, confusing the kin-dom of God with national power, seeking dominion, and calling it holiness. That is not what this is.

Budgets are moral documents. Where a government — or a church, individual, or a family — puts its money tells the truth about what it actually values. Not what it proclaims from a podium. What it measurably, actually, puts its treasure toward.

And we are watching leaders drape themselves in the language of Christian faith — speaking of God and nation and righteousness — while cutting the very programs that feed hungry children, house unhoused neighbors, and care for the elderly and the sick.

You cannot post the Ten Commandments in every classroom and then cut the programs that embody the greatest commandment — to love God, and to love your neighbor as yourself. That is not a political observation. That is a Matthew 6 observation. Jesus had a word for it. You already know the word. I believe God calls us to a different kind of Christianity, a deeper kind of faithfulness.

Jesus says: do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Not because heaven is far away and earth doesn't matter. But because the economy of the kin-dom, is the one where love is the currency, where the last are first, where what is done in secret is seen, and where that seeing is enough. *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

So this week, sit with a simple, searching question: *where is my heart already invested?*

Not where you think it should be. Not where you wish it were. But where, honestly, is it right now? And then — ask God to turn it. That is the prayer underneath all of stewardship. Not *Lord, help me give more*, but *Lord, turn my heart. Reorient me toward what is true and lasting and good. Help me want what you want. Help me love what you love.*

We cannot do this on our own. The *yagrumo* leaf does not turn itself. It turns because it is made to respond to light. And so are we. Justice is what love looks like in public. And generosity — rooted, faithful, unglamorous generosity — is what deep trust in God looks like in public. That is our witness. That is our answer to this moment. Not a louder declaration. A deeper investment. A truer turning — like the *yagrumo* leaf, silver side up, toward the only light that lasts. Ask God to turn your heart. And watch what follows. *Amen.*