

The following is a worship service prepared by a working group under the direction of the Stewardship and Mission Education committee of Alberta and Northwest Conference. You are invited to use all or part of the worship as part of your stewardship programming and celebration. We have used the lectionary from October 20th as the basis for the worship. Our thanks to Jo-Ann Wilson-Symonds, Jeff Crittenden and Debbie Hubbard for preparing the worship.

**Your life is your message: An invitation to celebrate and live what we believe**

**Our Gathering:**

*Prelude*

*Sharing of the Peace*

One: The peace of God be with you

All: and also with you.

One: Let us greet one another with signs of love and reconciliation

*The Life and Work of the Church/Congregational Announcements*

**Our Approach:**

*Invitation to worship:*

(Voices United #371 or SFGP #82 can be quietly played as the following story and invitation is shared by the worship leader)

*Story:* Once while Mahatma Gandhi's train was pulling slowly out of the station, a European reporter ran up to his compartment window. "Do you have a message I can take back to my people?" he asked. It was Gandhi's day of silence, a vital respite from demanding speaking schedule, so he didn't reply. Instead, he scrawled a few words on a piece of paper and passed it to the reporter: "My life is my message".

Let us quiet our minds and bodies, and be still on the inside so that we can ready ourselves to listen for God's message for our lives.

(Continue with the music for a few minutes so that people have a centering time)

**One:** We have come to this place, at this time,

**Left side of church:** We come because of habit, because of our searching

**Right side of church:** We come because of our faith, because of our doubt.

**Left side of church:** We come because of our friendships, because of love.

**All:** But we are here. And God is here.

Let us worship God.

**Hymn:** God, We Praise You For the Morning (Voices United #451, SFGP #79)

**Prayer of Approach and the Lord's Prayer:**

Eternal God, we have gathered in community to remind ourselves that we are in your presence at all times. In the midst of the many voices that surround us, teach us to be attentive to your voice. In the midst of all the pressures of our daily living, make us long to do your will. Grant us the courage to shine light in dark places and to fearlessly seek your truth in faith that your love and your truth will set us free. As followers of Jesus we are bold to pray...

Our Father...

**Circle Time**

*(Materials needed: 2-5 rolls of pennies, many baskets (10-20), a few older children/teacher parents to help, the words and music to the 'magic penny' song and a smile)*

Invite the children up for circle time and introduce our magic penny. I recommend having your children cover their ears while you explain to the congregation what will happen. Which is: the children will go out into the congregation and give every person a

penny while, together, we sing the magic penny song. Then, upon returning to the circle we will emphasize that now we have less than when we started. Indicate how foolish it is to give money away- to share money with others- or is it?

Then, after talking about sharing and faith briefly, tell the children that you have an idea. Why don't we share with our world and community? Why don't we give half of our sharing to our local idea and the other half to the M&S fund. A United church fund that helps people all over the world and right here, next door (or maybe in our doors) to us. Please have picked a local need for money- meals on wheels, ambulance, farm safety before hand. Finally, ask the kids to go back out into the congregation while singing the magic penny song and watch as those pennies grow into nickels, dimes, quarters, loonies, toonies, five's, tens.... (you will be surprised at people's generosity). And once everyone is back together again in the circle, put all of the money into one basket and have the kids pray with you, giving thanks for God's and our congregations generosity.

### ***Prayers of Reconciliation***

**All:** O God, what strange people we are!  
We have more things than most people yet we want more and more  
More gadgets, more experiences, more toys, more channels,  
But your Word warns us not to satisfy our worldly desires-  
Only the desires from your Spirit  
We want to remember that our most priceless treasure is from you.  
You, yourself, in the healing life of Jesus.  
You, yourself, in the self-giving death of Jesus.  
You, yourself, in the victorious resurrection of Jesus.  
You, yourself, in us and among us.  
Amen.

**One:** Hear the Good News! God's grace is for us all without reserve.

**All:** We joyfully accept God's shower of loving forgiveness which frees us to live full lives as Christ's disciples.

**One:** God writes a new law upon our hearts, a law of self-giving and service.

**All:** Thanks be to God for this gift of freedom!

**Hymn:** Teach Me God to Wonder (Voices United #299, SFGP #36)

### ***Psalm #99***

Raise your sights from the ruts of routine

**Look up, look up, to the Lord who stands above everything**

For God is greater than any abstract theory

Any set of principles or moral values

**God embodies all that is right and good**

Whatever is true, honest, and just.

**Whatever is pure, lovely and admirable--**

If it deserves, it is of God.

**But we mortals keep our heads down**

Like ants at a picnic, we busy ourselves with crumbs and miss the bigger picture.

**God is too great for us to grasp.**

We know God through the lives of those who have known God.

**Our spiritual ancestors stumbled over God's unexpected presence**

When they stubbed their toes, God forgave them

because they were willing to learn

**God watched over them guiding their feet.**

In God we find the extreme example

of how we should act towards others.

**Scripture:** *Matthew 22: 15-22*

**Sung Response:** Gloria (Voices United #37, SFGP #33)

**Meditation:** "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"

Honey, she said. "Would you come a little closer?" Her yellow dress pressed against her grandmother's dark oak bed. Propped-up by a pillow, you could see in her gentle creases, her beauty. You could see the twinkle in her eye. 'Honey, I want you to have this'. A slightly tarnished locket dangled from the end of a golden chain. Her granddaughter's face lit up. Softly, she whispered, "Dear this was my grandmothers. I want you to have it. You remind me of her so much..."

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

He stared down at her tiny, wrinkled hands. Life was changing so rapidly: his job, his buddies, house payments, no more vacations in the winter. All of that blurred into the background... for all that he could see now... were her tiny, wrinkled hands. All he could hear... was her soft gurgling. Wrapped tightly in a soft pink blanket he knew that he had just laid his eyes on the most precious treasure he could ever imagine....

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

She fell to her knees and wailed. "Please God, no, please, please. Please God." A siren screamed out in the night as the ambulance rushed to where he lay. Two cars -twisted metal, one person lying very, very still. She ran closer. Two police officers held her back. Her body went limp in their arms. Ma'am, you'll have to stay here. With tears streaming down her face she blurted out, 'he's my son, he's my son'.

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

Every Sunday we gather together in community. Some, perhaps, more willing than others but together we gather. And every Sunday, we are invited to participate in spiritual things. We sing hymns of faith, we bow our heads in prayer, we listen to stories from scripture and of course, we listen to the preacher, like I am today, trying to make sense of it all.

Every Sunday, or whatever day and time your community gathers, we hope that something catches our attention and I don't mean something that will simply keep us awake! We hope for something that stirs our souls, that causes us to stop and think, to stop and feel, to stop and to recognize the One that we call Holy in our lives.

We hope that the treasure of the church, the Spirit of God, will ignite our souls with dignity, with hope and with love. And somehow, deep inside, we recognize that maybe, just maybe our tangible treasures; the treasures that we have the privilege of seeing, of touching, of smelling and of loving are sitting next to us or maybe a pew away or maybe, in another place.

Any given Sunday, about this time of year, throughout our land, we will hear the preacher, or if the preacher is not courageous enough, a delegated soul stand-up and boldly say something like, 'we need more money' or 'we don't have enough money to...' or some variation of that theme. And on whatever Sunday that occurs, chances are the message will be seasoned lightly with guilt or maybe with the fear of closing doors. Perhaps even with a season of urgency or duty or obligation. You know the words... you have heard them all before.

Somehow money will become the bottom-line of our faith, dictating instead of inviting as if it was the head of the banquet table; more prominent than hope, or humility, or generosity, or even love. Don't feel too badly, it's not the first time that money raced to the front of the line, to the head of the table.

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

A crowd was beginning to form around him. It wasn't very often that Herodians left the Temple area to mix with the others, especially when the Pharisees were around. The question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor or not?" Jesus was silent. He looked around the crowd. He could see the trap. It was a religious question filled with the venom of politics. A simple, 'yes', pay the taxes would satisfy Rome and her cronies. A simple, 'no', don't pay would mean Jesus would be guilty of treason to Rome but a hero in the revolution.

Silence.

The crowd moved in.

Jesus asked for a coin that was used to pay the tax to Rome.

'Whose head is this, whose title?'

Everyone knew that the coin had the image of Tiberius, the son of the Divine Caesar Augustus, the son of god! stamped into it. Everyone knew that you had to pay Roman taxes with Roman coins; that you had to give to Tiberius, the son of God, his coin. And, everyone knew that Jewish people were not supposed to touch such blatant idolatry.

The Pharisees and the Herodians rubbed their hands in glee. They had him. This troublemaking, self-righteous, self-proclaimed teacher from Nazareth was going to have to choose a side. Finally, they had him.

Jesus took in a breath and with the power of the Spirit, he aimed straight at the heart of the matter, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's".

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

What is the treasure of our faith? Where is the treasure of our church? Who sits at the head of the banquet table where you meet to celebrate the One who inspires our lives? Is it the banker? Is it the accountant? Is it the bean counter? Is it fear? desperation? hopelessness? Is the host of our banquet table being too realistic? Being too practical? Telling us that the only way we will keep the doors open to this place is if we...

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

Wait. Listen. The tarnished locket at the end of the golden chain...you remember, the one that has passed in love from one generation to another, from one heart to another. That cost money did it not? Someone probably saved for a long time to buy that locket. Someone probably made some significant sacrifices to acquire that locket. That locket is the symbol of a treasured relationship.

And what about that newborn baby? Will it not cost money to raise that child and to feed her and give her a chance for an education? What does it cost to raise a precious son or

daughter today? Yesterday? Tomorrow? Is she worth the investment? Is that relationship worth the cost?

We all know what it costs to provide health care. We are all painfully aware of those costs. But what is the price for providing the health care needed to save a life; to provide an ambulance... nurses and doctors... to provide some medical attention that just might provide relief? That just might restore his health. That just might save her son's life? What is the cost of that relationship? What is the price for a relationship of healing?

Friends, money does not contaminate human treasures unless money becomes the treasure. Money does not contaminate unless money displaces what is precious. Money, friends, is not the problem that our faith communities face today. Our problem is deeper than that. The most precious treasure of our faith is tied up with idols and in shadows. The most precious treasure of our church desperately wants its place back at the head of the table. And truth be told, that is really where we want it also. Back where it belongs.

But let us also not be so naive as to thinking that the church can sustain itself on love alone. For we do know two things for certain about precious treasures: the first is that we will achieve nothing - not passing on gifts of love, not raising a child, not upholding a health care system nor producing a hymn book, or helping a food bank, or keeping our church's ministry in the streets serving people - without money.

The other thing that we know is that it is a sin to give money the power to destroy our greatest treasures - our families, our communities, our country and especially, our churches. Money is not at the head of the table, God is!

So let us speak plainly and honestly about money. We know that money has power in our world. Money has the power to move mountains and to raise valleys. Money has the power to change lives, to change destinies. Money has power - there is no question about that. But we also know that the greatest treasure of our church is the power of relationships. The power of knowing that God is God - there is no other. And that, somehow, every here and there, now and then, we experience that treasure. We experience it in a smile, an embrace, a sharing of who we are, what we have. You know, those treasures of the heart.

Yes I can hear you! I know that it takes money. And yes, I know that it is true, there is never enough. But it is also true that whenever our greatest treasure is at the head of the table inviting and encouraging others to taste the fruits of forgiveness, of healing, of hope, of love, of home, then there is always more than enough for all who gather.

God has a way of doing that.

Jesus knew that because he lived it, he modeled it for us to learn. It is God's world. And if we are honest about it - everything that we have and everything that we are is really a gift from God. Our invitation to the banquet is really an invitation to cultivate our greatest treasure, our relationships, with whatever resources we have.

I am sure that is why Jesus was so silent while the Herodians and the Pharisees waited for his answer. Jesus could see so clearly as he looked at that coin stamped with the image of an impostor god. He could see that the greatest treasure of our lives was so much more than a coin. He could see who was really at the head of the table with arms outstretched, inviting and encouraging... he could see our greatest treasure of all!

Friends, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Anthem/Hymn:**



**Our Response:**

*Our Offering for God's Mission*

(Tune: Voices United, 541, SFGP #11)  
*Praise God, all people of the light  
Praise Christ, who teaches what is right  
Now Spirit-filled, we hear the call  
To share our gifts, our lives, our all.*

**Dedication Prayer:**

God of all that is,  
You teach us not only to pray for ourselves but to have concern for others and to  
give thanks for all of life.  
We ask your blessing on these gifts,  
May each of us and the world be transformed by their use. Amen.

**Prayers for these times:**

*Loving God,*  
You have endowed us with many gifts,  
Bless our church, the United Church of Canada  
and the work that it is able to do through the Mission and Service Fund.  
We uphold our church leaders and ask your blessing on their work  
We pray for each member of our congregation  
Now, aloud or in the silence of our hearts, we pray for those who are in need of your  
healing touch and presence....  
May each of us leave worship today carrying a spirit of hope and passion that our  
communities and world reflect your vision of justice and peace for all.  
Lord hear our prayers...  
**and in your mercy bring hope and healing**  
Amen.

**Sending Forth in Hope...**

*Benediction:*

Leader: Let us go in celebration of God's goodness  
All: Let us go with thanksgiving  
Leader: Let us go with thanks-living  
All: Let us go with the love of God.  
Leader: May the light of God surround you.  
The love of God enfold you.  
The power of God sustain you  
The presence of God protect you  
Wherever you are God is.  
Amen.

Prayers and readings were adapted from the following resources:

*Your Life is Your Message...* by Eknath Easwaran  
*Gathering: a packet for worship planners*  
*Everyday Psalms* by James Taylor