

“Treasures in Heaven: Hearts of Gold”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden for FUMC
Grand Junction, Pentecost Sunday, July 3, 2022

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/worship-services>

Scripture Texts:

Matthew 6:19-21 [NRSV]

OPENING

♪ “Heart of Gold” (Neil Young)

Many of the classic rock songs of our culture carry messages that lend themselves to exploration in worship because either:

- (1) they reinforce elements of Biblical themes / Christian theology OR
- (2) they are critiqued by the same.

This iconic piece from Neil Young seems to reflect both of these ideas.

SERMON THOUGHTS

As to the reinforcing of Biblical themes / Christian theology, Neil Young’s yearning for a “heart of gold” expresses the highest longings of the human soul, the most noble aspirations, I think, in a very simple metaphor.

Those who are held up as role models, as exemplars of faithfulness, as women and men we ought to emulate in our values, behaviors, speech, and interactions with

others are not the crass, the vulgar, the dishonest, the insecure, the unscrupulous, the self-centered. Heavens no!

Despite the popularity of some in the world today with those traits, we would not say they have “hearts of gold”. Wouldn’t we say that those with “hearts of gold” embody the exact *opposite* of those base traits? Wouldn’t you say that the longing for a “heart of gold” is very much in line with the best of the Biblical narrative and Christian theology? One of the early church theologians, Irenaeus (*ca.* mid-second century), proclaimed, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive!” And such a one would surely have a heart of gold.

As Young confesses in this song – confesses for himself and for you and me – the “expressions he never gives” only reflect the true longing of his heart that he live differently: That he embody virtue, values, and maturity *and* make contributions to the world around him that align with what could be described simply as a “heart of gold”.

And he realizes the fleeting nature of life, the brief span of time we have to cultivate such a heart – a cultivation that is *exhausting* given the hard task of mining in rocky, unyielding, and sometimes dangerous soil, all bent on burying the miner beneath tons of cultural, social, and political debris that render his or her efforts futile. Yet, he doesn’t give up...he keeps searching for a heart of gold – despite being worn down in the process.

The second verse betrays the searcher's experience of the rarity of the find. Not unlike Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes, he's sought for this deepest longing in flashy luster of human society and in nature, in the confines of his own fragile mind, and in places far and wide. And he keeps searching...

One gets the sense that, while not giving up on the quest, the searcher is also dubious concerning the certainty of the outcome. I don't know if I'm impressed by the insight or saddened by the cynicism of the realization, "and I'm gettin' old", by someone who has not even reached his 26th birthday.

TO THE SCRIPTURES

This is where the iconic song faces critique from Biblical tradition, and by "critique", I mean "course correction", not "smug dogmatism".

You really want to achieve a heart of gold?

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Of course, the journey of our lifetimes is in discerning what constitutes our "treasures". (*Expound briefly as time allows...*)

This is not a trivial or inconsequential exercise. As Jesus says, we will find our hearts in the very places

we hide our treasure. May we find our hearts in the golden glow of heaven and not in the rusty wreckage of the world's values.

Let's pray...

TRANSITION to Communion

♪ "The Last Supper" (Cindy Morgan) w/ Ppt slides