

**“Where your treasure is ...” a sermon based on Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 and Luke 12:32-40 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 11 August 2019.**

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

We often turn that text around so it says – where our heart is there our treasure will be. But Jesus knows us better than that, and he knows the power of treasure to shape our lives.

Where your treasure is ...

In 1968 New Zealand’s first steel mill was built on the banks of the Manukau Harbour just across from Mangere Airport. In no time, there were signs of pollution. Sheep turned grey. Five kilometres downwind houses were coated in ash. Water flowed from the mill into the harbour and affected shell-fish beds. At the local secondary school, there was a biology teacher who noticed what was happening. His senior biology classes began monitoring the pollution. Sampling of water. Sampling of wool. Sampling of shell-fish. Surveys of local people. A picture developed. A map emerged. Papers were written. Information was displayed. The steel mill owners realised they needed to address the issues being raised. These young students learned the importance of biology. Here was a teacher, trained, experienced, energetic, investing his treasure in the care of creation, influencing young people for years to come, winning them to address damage to ecologies.

The local hapu had its marae immediately across the harbour from the mill. They too noticed damage to their traditional fishing grounds and ash on their wharenuī and the smell that wafted over the water. There was a Maori kuia, Dame Nganeko Minhinnick. When Nganeko was 11, because she was the most fluent speaker of English in her hapu, her elders sent her off to the Maori Land Court because they wanted to know why they were losing land and fishing grounds. That set her on a path of leadership including in caring for the environment. So when she noticed increasing pollution in the harbour, she led a landmark Waitangi Tribunal claim to clean it up, helped by a team of young lawyers. Which led to a significant change in how these matters were approached.

The Tribunal's report set out a new basis for the Maori role as kaitiaki, or guardians, of their ancestral lands and waterways throughout the country. It informed the development of resource management law.

One of those lawyers became chief justice. Another lawyer led cases that brought the Treaty of Waitangi into the centre of New Zealand decision-making for the first time in our history. He became a high court judge whose decisions sought to apply the law to protect the least favoured. Influenced by the faith in which he was nurtured, that is what he thought the law was for.

These were people who invested treasure for people at the edge. They stood for the rights of those least privileged.

You will know people like this, people whose treasure, whatever it is, is given to the reign of God, even if they do not name what they do in those terms. They are all around us.

An older person taking time to listen as a young person describes what seems to them the prison in which they are living, from which they want to be free, a place of harm and violence. The listening person, helps the young person find safety, thus able to live a life of freedom and flourishing.

What inspired them? Perhaps they experienced a time when they were young and in difficulty, and someone came alongside them, and listened to them, and they knew what difference that made, how it made them feel. They resolved to give themselves to that way of being.

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

A whanau raises a child in danger of losing love, taking them in, offering them safety and support, persevering with the care, and putting aside their comfort and convenience to do it. That whanau has seen before what difference awhi can make. They know that some of the people in their whanau are flourishing because someone did that to them.

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

People so concerned for our planet, they create opportunities for people to speak, to act, to demonstrate, to commit towards a different way of being, that offers our planet more hope. Perhaps they saw how a small group of people could change the minds of a larger group by intelligent creative persevering.

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

A man determined to reduce his footprint, who develops his garden until he hardly needs to buy vegetables, who installs solar panels even in a town not known for sun, and who takes care of how he travels.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also, and gradually you will be drawn more and more into the world that opens up.

Jesus calls that world the kingdom of God, the realm of God, how things are when God way is embodied, when the way of Jesus is lived.

We are a community of that vision.

Our vision statement states “we are captivated by the biblical vision of the realm of God, made known in Jesus, given in grace.”

We are surrounded by people who invest their treasure in the kingdom of God.

Through them we become captivated, inspired to do the same. We receive their influence as gifts of God’s grace.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

The writer of Hebrews invites us to give ourselves to the realm of God, to the future God has for the world.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Abraham and Sarah gave themselves to that realm, even though they did not receive what was promised, even though they were as strangers and foreigners among people satisfied with what was. Their homeland, a healed creation, forever tugged at their hearts, drove them on.

This is the meaning of faith in God, the God who in Jesus Christ saves and sends. Faith is trust, trust that God's realm is worth giving our lives to, that God's realm is being given to us. The church is a community captivated by the realm of God.

This meal we are about to share is a foretaste of the promised kingdom. Here we are invited to taste and see and experience it so that it shapes who we are, that it sets the pattern of our living. Here we are invited to stand at the table as a sign that we trust in this realm enough to give ourselves to it. This is where our treasure belongs.

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

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**Knox Church**  
449 George Street  
Dunedin  
New Zealand  
Ph. (03) 477 0229  
[www.knoxchurch.net](http://www.knoxchurch.net)

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, [minister@knoxchurch.net](mailto:minister@knoxchurch.net)