

Message: "Christ, Our Treasure"

Esperanza and I love a good adventure story. I expect many of you are the same. I remember reading Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* when I was young. From then I was hooked. The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Tom Swift ... the list goes on. It still does today. We love putting ourselves in the role of the heroine or hero.

One thing common to the plot in these stories is the discovery of an ancient chart or map, some sort of key to unlock the secret.

Whatever lies at the heart of the mystery leads us to buried treasure or saves the world. We'll be rich and famous beyond our wildest dreams.

Yet there are always problems. Some people think the map is imaginary, a fantasy. Others say the hero isn't reading it right, isn't interpreting the secret code the right way. And, invariably, there are dangers to be faced, both in the journey to the far-off place and in the threat from other people who want to stop us from getting there. But we know how the story should end. We want the heroine to overcome the dangers and difficulties, find the treasure and get safely back home.

You may not realize it, but I'm describing what Paul wrote about in his letter to the Colossians (1:26-27). He speaks about God's secret plan, a plan that's hidden, like a map in a locked and dusty cupboard, for ages and generations. Now, suddenly, it's come to light in the events concerning Jesus, the Messiah. Paul has the map and he's inviting us to join him on the hunt for the treasure.

Paul tells us plainly what the treasure is. He tells us what dangers we'll face as we try to make it our own. And Paul tells us the route we need to take to get to it. It shouldn't be any surprise at this point to realize the treasure is this: Jesus is our Lord and King.

Jesus is God's secret plan. He is the treasure. Jesus is the one who helps us ward off danger. He's the one who guides us on the way. Finding Jesus and knowing him is what makes us spiritually rich, content and well off for all our lives. This is truly what it means to be blessed by God. But first ... let's talk about the dangers a bit.

Power, money and sex. All three of the temptations we face were on display last week and this week in our readings from Amos and Hosea, two lesser-known prophets. These are some of the very great dangers we face on our journey to a meaningful life.

Take today’s reading from Hosea. The language can strike us as harsh. And it comes with a lot of overtones. After all, the text is written by men with a particular view of the role of women, sex and the power dynamic in the household and community. For example, the word “prostitute” in the Common English Bible can also be translated as “adulterous” or “promiscuous.” There’s still a relationship problem, but the status of the woman involved isn’t the issue. It’s an illustration.

You see, at the end of the day, Hosea isn’t talking just about sex. Yes, promiscuity is a problem. It was then and it is today. Pornography and adultery distract us from seeking a spiritual life. They aren’t helpful in our relationship. But it’s only one of the dangers we face. It’s one of the ways we decide to go our own way, no matter what the plan says or which way may be healthier for us.

Hosea is speaking a sad message to people who are lost in their own selfish desires. Their relationships are corrupted. The love they had for God and each other has become misplaced. They have lost their way, caught up in other desires and unhealthy practices. Money, power and sex can all become idols leading us away from a loving relationship with God and those who are close to us.

There’s a lot more going on in Hosea, more than we can cover in the brief time we have on Sunday mornings. If you’d like to explore and discover God’s Word together, I invite you to join one of our online Bible study groups. We meet Monday at 10:00 am and Wednesday at 7:00 pm (PDT).

Turning back to our narrative, we find a dilemma. God gave us a map to the treasure, eternal life in heaven. The key is right before us, hidden in plain sight. But we’re distracted. We keep missing it. We keep going off on our own and encountering pitfalls. We’ve polluted our relationship with other people. We’ve ignored and taken for granted

our relationship with God. Our vow of faithfulness is all but meaningless. We've broken our covenant, our vow.

This leaves God with a dilemma. To use the analogy from Amos, we're like a basket of rotting summer fruit. We look good on the outside, but we're rancid on the inside. Most of us would throw the fruit away, clean house, fumigate and start over.

But God is faithful and true. God made a promise to Abraham. And God honors the promise. God loves us even when we rebel and spit harsh words or pursue unhealthy desires. Even when we turn to evil, God never forgets. And God is willing to forgive.

Henri Nouwen shares God's solution to the problem of human sin. "God chose to enter human history in complete weakness. This divine choice forms the center of Christian faith. In Jesus of Nazareth, a powerless God appeared among us to unmask the illusion of power, disarm the prince of darkness who rules the world, and bring the divided human race to a new unity. It's through unmitigated powerlessness that God shows us divine mercy It's very hard - if not impossible - for us to grasp this divine mercy. We keep praying to the 'almighty and powerful God.' But all might and power is absent from the One who reveals God to us saying: 'When you see me, you see God.' If we truly want to love God, we must look at the man of Nazareth, whose life was wrapped in weakness. And his weakness opens for us the way to the heart of God."¹

The very God who told the people of Hosea's time "I will not be your God" also said "children of the living God" (v11). God blesses us by keeping promises. God forgives. All we have to do is turn back to God. We still live through the ramifications of our own decisions and actions. But, when we turn back to God, we'll find outstretched arms and a place to rest our weary head. And, for that above all, I give thanks and praise to God.

So now, let's take a moment to share God's blessings with each other. I know you've given and received blessings since we last gathered. Please turn to a person seated near you and ask:

¹ *Henri Nouwen Society, daily devotion, July 16, 2022*

“What blessings did you give or receive this week?”

I look forward to hearing your story during our social time.

I invite each of you to share now.

Thank you for sharing. I pray for God to richly bless you, your family and the ministry of blessing you are called and equipped to do by God. To God be the glory!

Let us pray:

Lord, help us to trust you, each and every day. Give us the boldness to speak in your name, to offer your love to a world hurting and in need of hope. Help us to follow you and be transformed by your love so we may bless others with the same love. Bless us when we live generously, sharing your love with others. We commit ourselves to you in faith and in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hosea 1:2-10 (CEB)

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, marry a prostitute and have children of prostitution, for the people of the land commit great prostitution by deserting the Lord.” So Hosea went and took Gomer, Diblaim’s daughter, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. The Lord said to him, “Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will destroy the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Jezreel Valley.” Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Name her No Compassion, because I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have compassion on the house of Judah. I, the Lord their God, will save them; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen.” When Gomer finished nursing No Compassion, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Then the Lord said, “Name him Not My People because you are not my people, and I am not your God.”

Yet the number of the people of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered; and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it will be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

Colossians 2:6-15 (CEB)

So live in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way as you received him. Be rooted and built up in him, be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught. See to it that nobody enslaves you with philosophy and foolish deception, which conform to human traditions and the way the world thinks and acts rather than Christ. All the fullness of deity lives in Christ’s body. And you have been filled by him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not administered by human hands. The circumcision of Christ is realized in the stripping away of the whole self dominated by sin. You were buried with him through baptism and raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead because of the things you had done wrong and because your body wasn’t circumcised, God made you alive with Christ and forgave all the things you had done wrong. He destroyed the record of the debt we owed, with its requirements that worked against us. He canceled it by nailing it to the cross. When he disarmed the rulers and authorities, he exposed them to public disgrace by leading them in a triumphal parade.