

For Where Your Treasure Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also
Matthew 6:19-21

Do you know who Amy Purdy is? I didn't until a few weeks ago, but my daughter has since told me that everyone knows who Amy Purdy is, so maybe it's just me who didn't. But just in case you've been as out of touch as I am, here's the story. Amy Purdy is a young woman who contracted meningitis when she was nineteen, and as a result of that terrible illness, both her legs were amputated at the knee. She also had a kidney transplant. Her family and her doctors thought she was going to die, but she didn't. And then she not only lived; she went on to become a national snowboarding champion. She competed on *Dancing With the Stars*. She's given a TED talk, written a book, created her own fashion design business. Quite amazing.

Here's why I mention her: A few weeks ago I heard Amy Purdy speak. Her message was, "At some point in life, something happens to us—something will happen to all of us—that seems like it shuts down all the possibilities you thought were in front of you. When that happens, you can give up; sometimes that feels like the only thing you can do. But you can also choose something else. That's a moment when you can be *born again*, choose to begin a new life with all the possibilities that are in front of you now."

I'm pretty sure she used the words "born again", because they caught me up short. I thought, "That's just what we say in church."

At the same conference, I also heard Justice Sonia Sotomayor, from the United States Supreme Court. She was equally inspiring. Her message was, "Your life is never hopeless. There is always hope, and possibility, and even greatness ahead of you, no matter where you've come from or how hard your life is now." Her day-to-day work may be in the law, Justice Sotomayor said, but her calling is to bring hope to the hopeless. I thought, "That's just what we say in church."

A few weeks before that, I heard a radio interview with Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, a psychiatrist, who talked about how our fear gets in the way of loving ourselves and other people. When I heard him I thought, "That's just what we say in church."

The trailer for Oprah Winfrey's new television series called "Belief" begins with these words, in Oprah's voice: "My confidence comes from knowing there is a force, a power, greater than myself, that I'm a part of and is also a part of me." That's just what we say in church.

If it was ever true that church was the only place you could go to find wisdom for living a better life, it is no longer so. There is wisdom, and maybe even holiness—something sacred and true, something that can elevate you to resolve to live a better life—in other

religious traditions, in therapy, in self-help books, in inspiring quotes that get circulated on Facebook and Pinterest. You can find experiences that make you feel happy and fulfilled by taking a hike, or listening to music on your phone, or volunteering, or just having breakfast with your friends.

So why do we need church?

That seems like a particularly important question to ask today, as this church asks you to make a commitment—to pledge your financial support—for the next year. A pledge is not a contract; no one will ever sue you in small claims court for failing to complete it. But it is a commitment. It's not like a tip that you decide to leave—or not—at the end of a meal in a restaurant. A pledge is something you promise in advance. It's not a gratuity for good service; it's more like an investment you make, in an experience that will require your participation all along the way.

I hope you've noticed that we haven't asked you to think about your pledge in terms of the church's need to meet its budget. The church's budget for next year hasn't been created yet. The church will do as much or as little as its members tell us—with their pledges—that they want to do. We've asked, instead, that you think about the amount of your commitment as an investment in your own spiritual life, the life of faith you want for yourself in 2016. That takes some thought. We're asking you pledge an amount that's significant for you, more than what's left over at the end of the month or what you can give without noticing that money is gone. An amount that shifts something in your life: maybe what order you write that check in among the bills on your desk; or whether you'll have to think twice about another purchase.

And this year, we've asked you to think about *two* commitments: not only what you might think of as your “regular” pledge, but a pledge to a new Innovation Fund, a pledge that says you want this church to be working on new ministries, things we have never tried before. Projects that might change the church into the kind of place your children or grandchildren would want to come. That's a lot. That's different than how you respond to a letter that comes in the mail with a nickel inside of it or a picture of a sad puppy on the envelope. You're being invited this morning to make the church one of your *major* commitments for the whole year ahead.

Which begs the question again: Why? What makes the church different—necessary—a worthy investment—when it's easy to find an inspirational message whenever you feel like you need one—by going to a conference, or subscribing to a daily email blast, or just cruising around on the Internet?

No doubt there are lots of answers to that question, but here's the one I hope will mean something to you today: The church is a community of people who *practice* living the life you hope for. It's a community of people who come together every week not just to

hear a soaring piece of music or a few words that might inspire them, but to practice together what it means to walk in the footsteps of Jesus; how to actually *live* a life that is less fearful, more compassionate, more focused on the things that really matter. A church—*this* church—is a community of people who will walk alongside of you on a journey you have chosen for yourself. People who will surround you when you stumble, and remind you to put your hand out to help someone else when you forget to look up. It's a home where you will be welcome *and it's a place* where you will be challenged, over and over again, to change. It's a community that *will not leave you alone*.

Is that what you want for yourself? Do you want to actually *live* the kind of life that you hear in the Gospels? Then invest in that life, Jesus said. Put your treasure—the things you value: your time, your energy, your money—into something that will keep turning you in that direction. Invest in it even *before* you see the results, Jesus said. Invest in it because that's how you line up the rest of your life to move in that direction. Your heart doesn't lead you there, Jesus said; it follows.

You know, in every learning space—every classroom or lecture hall or meeting room, or even sanctuary—people have a place where they typically sit. I was a pretty enthusiastic student, so when I was in school, I used to sit toward the front, ready to learn and to participate. As an adult, I'm not so much that way. When I enter a learning space, I often sit in the back, near a door, so that I can slip out easily. Also, if I sit in the back, I can let my mind wander without worrying about whether I'm being rude to the speaker. If I weren't the pastor, I'd probably be sitting in the back row of church. Maybe that's why God called me to be a pastor—because God knew that if I was going to pay attention to my spiritual life, he was going to have to get me up here to sit at the front.

This isn't really about where you sit in church on Sunday mornings. I know that people sit in the back of the church for lots of good reasons. But it's a good metaphor. If you've been someone who's been hiding out in the back corner of your commitment—to your faith or to this church—maybe it's time to move up to the front. To make a pledge that says, “Yes. This is what I want for my life.” If faith is something you want more of in your life, if it's important to have a community that supports you and maybe even pushes you in that direction, then make a pledge that *says* that. Do it even if you're not completely sure your heart is there yet...because your heart doesn't always lead. Sometimes it follows. Jesus said so.