

ADVENT WEEK TWO

December 11, 2019

Treasures

Matthew 12:33-37

The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. Matthew 12:35

Matthew does not have an “original blessing” view of human nature. Elsewhere, his Jesus says, “*If you who are evil know how to give your children good things...*” (Matthew 7:11). In the present text, his dark assessment of the human heart is focused on Jesus’ brothers, the Pharisees. Some Pharisees had accused Jesus of being in cahoots with the devil in casting out the devil. Jesus faults their logic (“a house divided against itself will not stand”) but then repeatedly castigates them for their *words*. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks...” What a concept: speech is an expression of our hearts.

Remember, Jesus also connects heart and treasure (Matthew 6:21). And, in chapter 12, he says something fascinating about treasures: an evil person curates an evil treasure.

I don’t know how many times I’ve read this passage without the phrase “evil treasure” slapping me like a branch on a forest path in the dark that you don’t see until it stings you.

We all know about evil treasures. A treasure is what one values, stores, protects. A treasure is curated by attention; and we become what we attend to. When we (we as individuals, we as a group, we as a church, we as a society) save up fear, resentment, disappointment, jealousy, self-righteous anger (as in self-justifying, without openness to other’s points of view), or the need to dominate, denigrate, demonize, or dismiss another person or group in order to protect one’s own privilege and place in the pecking order, then we are building an evil treasure. Nothing good can come out of such a treasure: no good deeds, no good words, no restorative justice, no compassion, no peace.

Advent would be a good time to examine what kind of treasures we are curating in our hearts.

Dr. Gary Peluso-Verdend

President Emeritus and

Visiting Research Professor of Religion in Public Life