

Sermons at the All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 3rd August 2025

Bible passages: Colossians 3.1–11 and Luke 12.13–21

Prayer

We're looking out for treasures this summer – God's loving hints to us that there is more, to come deeper with him.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus told a parable about a rich man whose treasure was all stuff, stuff he'd grown, stuff he could sell, and somewhere to keep the stuff. Jesus told it in reply to someone who wanted him to judge an issue of inheritance rights. Jesus says concerns about possessions are secondary – you can store up riches for yourself if you want, but 'you fool' if you're not rich towards God!

In the letter we heard from St Paul, (NT page 198) Paul is talking to Christians who are working out *how* their day-to-day life should look different, now they've come to know Jesus. He tells them they *have* that kind of treasure, with God, that Jesus had talked about. In coming to Jesus their old life has died, and they have a new life, 'hidden with Christ in God'.

Paul says that having this new life in Christ, this treasure with God, is like taking off old clothes and putting on new ones. There's some work involved – changing clothes involves action. But there's a much bigger part for the Holy Spirit here – Paul says that once the Christians have clothed themselves, this new self 'is being renewed... according to the image **of its creator**'.

Human beings, already made in the image of God, are renewed, formed, shaped, into something more honest, more open, more true to God's image, as we come to Christ! We do the turning up, the Holy Spirit does the shaping. He's turning us not into carbon copies of 'proper Christians', but increasingly fulfilled versions of our unique selves. Christ is all, and in all!

This is why I went for the photo of the butterfly. The life cycle of the butterfly is one of those really encouraging parables from creation, where the caterpillar always has what it takes to become a butterfly, but you couldn't imagine, looking at the spiky caterpillar, that as it's *formed and shaped* in its chrysalis, it will come out with elegant silver-orange wings and the ability to fly.



A butterfly isn't an angel. There isn't any sense in these readings that the treasure with God is only useful to us in heaven, after death. Jesus and Paul are comparing it to an earthly treasure quite deliberately – you can treasure your wealth in the bank, or you can treasure your life lived in the flow of the Holy Spirit. The treasure begins now, and it certainly goes on for eternity, but we're expected to be drawing on it right now.

This is how we can hope to live the kind of lives which Paul talks about. Remember, this is not about trying but training. Paul, in this reading, puts the negatives, how *not* to live. To the rich fool in Jesus' parable, Paul's list of negatives might have sounded pretty acceptable. This list of things which the Christians have put behind them (mostly in verse 5) includes greed, unethical sexual behaviour, impulsive anger, wishing harm on others and putting money and possessions in front of God and humans. In verses 8 and 9 he lists some things which come from the mistaken priorities of verse 5: anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language and lying.

Are these lists like a checklist: don't do these things and you'll be OK with God? Or is Paul's list of the characteristics of love in One Corinthians a tick list to aim for: today I need to work on being patient, kind, generous, gracious, forgiving, faithful, hopeful and persistent?

Well, no, says Paul, and no, says Jesus. The *actions* aren't the treasure. *God* is the treasure of love, Jesus is the keeper of our renewed life, the Holy Spirit is the one renewing, shaping, forming, us. In our own strength we will try, and eventually fail, to keep up with God's tick-list, if that's how we understand it... But the good news is, that God isn't watching from a distance, checking to see if we're patient and pure enough to come close to him.

On the contrary, he's right here with us, offering his greatest treasure. God's treasure, as we read in the two great commandments before our confession, is love. It's his love for us, and it's our love for God and for our neighbour. When we treasure God, when we step deeper into the river of his love and align ourselves with the work of Jesus in the world, this renewing which Paul mentions is enabled. The renewal is something God's Holy Spirit does in us – we need to turn up for him, we need to ask him to be at work in us, and the realigning, shaping, forming, renewing begins. We aren't aiming to keep a tick-list of dos and don'ts, we're being offered an opportunity to transform into the nature of God, who loves us.

This is a lifelong process! It's not linear either (what human process is?) I expect you can see times in your life when you were more open to the work of the Holy Spirit in changing you, and times when you have drifted back out of the river. If you're anything like me, you'll be able to notice that those times of drifting were more filled with St Paul's misery list: more anger, more abusive language, more lies.

The answer is that this is a partnership. God is, in a remarkable way for a perfect Creator, looking at us and saying, 'You have no capacity to do this in your own strength, but work with me. Through my death on the cross and my indwelling Holy Spirit, you can lead this new life in Christ!'

When we talk about being rich towards God, about a life hidden with Christ, God is not saying: 'Do better, try harder, be good, stop being bad.' Miraculously, graciously, God is saying, 'Live with me, live *in* me, draw on *my* strength to love'. Miraculously, graciously, Jesus Christ is offering his life for us, saying 'Learn *with* me, I'm going the right way, join the flow of love'.

It's just... it's not easy to join the flow if the things on the bank keep drawing us back out. Jesus' parable warns us that the world will keep telling us to prioritise some short-term stuff, and the world will keep telling us that this Jesus-stuff of love for God, and love for humans, isn't the way to get on in life, it's no way to get any kind of security. We do all live in a continual struggle between the 'old life', which is very self-centred, and the renewed, shaped, formed life of someone whose treasure is in God.

Thank God, that he gives us a church, and his Holy Spirit, so that we aren't alone as we work this out with him!

Let's pray

Loving Father, generous Saviour, indwelling Holy Spirit, I come to you. I come before you for the first time, I come before you for the thousandth time, and I say: I want you to be my treasure. Fill me, Holy Spirit, so that my life flows your way, instead of the world's. Fill me so that I can love as you love. Fill me so that I can act in your love to those around me, and those far off. Jesus, be my treasure for ever.

Amen