Practicing your piety is ‘doing righteousness’ or ‘doing justice,’ as in ‘do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.’ Don’t be fooled because ‘piety’ is an old fashioned church word. We probably already know what Jesus is talking about, but it’s important to listen again, because even though sin is old as Adam and Eve, it always comes in shiny new packages.

**And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites;** for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

Your preacher loves to stand in the synagogue where they can be seen, but they DO NOT heap up empty phrases, though it may seem that way. At least they don’t mean to.

**But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret;** *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. **Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

**Pray then in this way:** Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one**.**

You’ll notice that Jesus does NOT insist that any prayers God listens to MUST be made ‘in Jesus’ name.’ If Jesus doesn’t care about it, chances are God doesn’t either.

**For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;** but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus is clear as a bell: If you don’t forgive, you won’t be forgiven. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. There’s a reason: “Resentment is like drinking poison, and waiting for someone else to die.”

**And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites,** for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

As for fasting, if anyone around here actually DOES fast, well, I can’t tell, so they’re doing a fantastic job following Jesus’ words. Well done!

**So ‘storing up treasure in heaven’ is done in this way:** Doing righteousness, ‘practicing piety,’ giving alms, whatever, in such a way that a good deed is its own reward. It IS its own reward, and the people who grasp this will not only have treasure in heaven, but will change the present world for the better.

**Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also:** That DOESN’T mean you’ll be preoccupied with dying and going to heaven, being so heavenly minded that you’re no earthly good. Not at all. What it means is that those hearts in heaven beat here on earth, and the saints with heaven-yearning hearts transform this world into something closer to where they yearn to be.

May you have opportunity this week to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God this week.

May you see a need and meet it, careful that God alone sees you.

May you pray in secret, bringing your needs and those of others before God who hears yet knows our needs before we even begin.

May you deny yourself for love’s sake.

So may you store up treasure in heaven. And may that treasure draw your heart in turn.

May that treasure return real dividends to you, and may your heaven-beating heart well up with streams of living waters here among us!

Friendship Lutheran Church 1 February 2015

**Sermon on the Mount II – Treasure in Heaven**

Last week was all about salt and light, metaphor through and through. There are NO metaphors in today’s Gospel text. Whatever Jesus means by “Treasure in Heaven,” it’s not a metaphor – it’s a real promise. The key today is the instruction Jesus gives near the end:

**St Matthew 6.19-21 -** Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; **but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,** where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**So how is THAT done?** The answer is in what Jesus says about ‘practicing piety,’ praying, forgiving and fasting.

**St Matthew 6.1-18 - Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them;** for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. **But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret;** *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*