



Worship Service Theme: Treasure
Chinese (Lunar) New Year; general early to mid-February

Helpful Elements:

Chinese decorations: banners, lanterns, Chinese knots

Red tablecloth

Oranges or tangerines for scent and snack

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is _____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. This week, **[insert applicable date here]** marks the beginning of the Lunar New Year. The Chinese culture celebrates **[current year]** as the Year of the **[Animal]**, one of twelve animal signs of the Chinese calendar. In Chinese culture, the **[Animal]** represents **[choose applicable adjectives]**.

Chinese or Lunar New Year is a really important holiday for more than 1 billion people. Chinese New Year is a festival for family reunion, when people celebrate together with special foods, clothing, and games. Red is a color of good luck, and Chinese knots like this one [*show knot and other decorations*] are a traditional Chinese craft used in decorations all year long. Oranges and mandarins are also symbols of good luck and fortune.

One tradition for Chinese New Year is giving children red envelopes, which contain money, symbolizing the wish to transfer fortune from the elders to the kids. Today we'll be drawing from Chinese history and tradition in our service, particularly the idea of **treasure**.

What is a treasure? Is it just about money? Perhaps surprisingly, during his time on Earth, Jesus talked about money and treasures a LOT – second only to talking about the kingdom of heaven. Interesting!

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently, and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology, p. 1

Statement of Faith, p. 2: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting “The Lord is My Shepherd” together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

⁴Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Hymns:

We Gather Together, p. 3

For the Beauty of the Earth, p. 4

Joyful, Joyful, p. 5

First reading: From the second chapter of the book of Proverbs:

My child, if you receive my words

and treasure up my commandments with you,

²making your ear attentive to wisdom

and inclining your heart to understanding; ...

⁴if you seek wisdom like silver

and search for it as for hidden treasures,

⁵then you will understand the fear of the Lord

and find the knowledge of God.

⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding ...
⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;
¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

Jesus Loves Me, p. 6

Oh, How I love Jesus, p. 7

Holy, Holy, Holy, p. 8

Second reading: From the twelfth chapter of the gospel of Luke:

[v. 15-20 are optional:] ¹⁵ Jesus said to the crowd, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." ¹⁶ And Jesus told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and the rich man thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And the rich man said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" ²⁰ But God said to the rich man, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" ...

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples ... "²⁹ Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek God's kingdom, and [all you need] will be added to you. ³² Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with ... a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

His Eye is on the Sparrow, p. 9

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms, p. 10

Interactive Homily: Chinese New Year celebrations include blessings or greetings for things everyone values: health, family, and wealth or fortune.

We may think that “treasure” doesn’t have any connection to our lives of faith, but think again! Both the Old and New Testament talk a LOT about money and where we find value.

- Let’s review: What is treasure? Is it just money? What things do you treasure?
 - freedom; family; friends; children; wisdom and understanding; faith
 - There may be physical possessions that you treasure; what kinds of things?
 - letters, mementos, jewelry, special clothing, artwork, musical instruments
- It’s very natural to love certain special things; but what eventually happens to *all physical things*?
 - They break, wear down, disintegrate. We enjoy things in the here and now, but they don’t last forever.
- What about the nonphysical treasures that we mentioned, things like friendship and love? How do we “own” nonmaterial treasures?
 - Nonmaterial treasures are not like a possession that eventually goes away. Nonmaterial things like relationships can be treasured forever in our hearts, minds, and souls.
- “Jesus talked a lot about money. Sixteen of Jesus’ thirty-eight parables concern how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses (288 in all) deal directly with the subject of money.”¹
 - I wonder why so many people strive after money more than anything else? What do we think money will do?
 - Keep us safe, secure
 - Make sure we get whatever we need
- We *are* supposed to work; honest labor is a gift from God. But Jesus says, “Don’t *worry* about what you’re going to eat and drink...” Why does Jesus say this?

¹ <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1996/december/410.html>

- It's not your work or money that makes you safe. God our Father provides for us! We have total freedom from worry.
- What can we do instead of worrying and striving after treasure?
 - Praise God and pray for what we need – “hallowed be thy name ... give us this day our daily bread.”
 - Give to others; help others; trust that God will provide: “Your Father knows that you need food and drink and clothing.”

Let us pray in silence for a moment, asking for renewed trust in God's promise to take care of all our needs.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymns:

He's Got the Whole World, p. 12

In the Garden, p. 13

Standing on the Promises, p. 14

Third Reading: Chinese Quotes on True Treasure

I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion. These three are your greatest treasures. –ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu

Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere. Learning is a treasure no thief can touch. –Chinese Proverb

If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people. –Chinese Proverb

Coarse rice to eat, water to drink, my bended arm for a pillow—therein is happiness. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means are nothing but drifting clouds. —ancient Chinese teacher and philosopher Confucius

Hymns:

It is Well with My Soul, p. 15

Amazing Grace, p. 16

Fourth Reading: A Chinese Folktale: “Lord of the Cranes”

There are places in China where the mountains reach all the way up to the clouds. High up on one of these mountains lived a wise old man. His name was Tian, which means “heaven.” There among the clouds lived Tian’s friends, the cranes. Tian fed them and cared for them. Tian was devoted to these birds, and they would do anything for him. That is why Tian was called Lord of the Cranes.

One day Tian decided to go down to the city. He wanted to see if people were remembering to be kind and generous. So Tian settled himself on the back of a crane and flew through the clouds.

In the city, Tian disguised himself as a beggar. Day after day, Tian went begging through the streets of the beautiful city. Many wealthy people passed by, but not a single person dropped a coin in Tian’s cup.

One evening Tian arrived at a small inn. Wang, the owner, welcomed him. “Could you give me a little something to eat and drink?” asked Tian. “I’m sorry, but I have no money to pay.”

Wang smiled cheerfully and waved away the apology. “Sit down. Take a rest!” Wang brought the old man a warm bowl of soup, rice, tea, and a plate of sizzling meat. Tian’s heart was as full as his belly when he left the inn that evening.

From then on, Tian came every day to Wang’s inn, where he was always welcome. Many months went by in this way. One day, Tian said to Wang, “I am deeply in your debt. You have been so good to me, I must find a way to repay you.” Wang was quite surprised. “But you do not need to repay me! What I have given to you, I’ve given gladly. It makes me happy when I can help someone.” Tian smiled.

“Nonetheless, I would like to repay you. Of course, I have no money, but I can give you something else...”

Tian untied a gourd from his walking stick and used it like the finest paintbrush to paint a picture of three cranes on the wall of the inn. Wang was astonished. “It is wonderful!” he exclaimed.

“Just wait, it gets better!” said Tian with a smile. He started to sing and clap his hands—and one by one the cranes fluttered off the wall and danced to Tian’s song.

Wang’s eyes and mouth were wide with astonishment. “Let your guests be merry,” Tian said. “When they start singing and clapping, the cranes will dance.” Tian turned to the door. “Wait,” Wang called, “Who are you, good sir?” But Tian just gave a friendly wave and disappeared.

Soon everyone in the city was talking about the wondrous dancing cranes at Wang’s Inn. More and more people came every day to marvel at the beautiful birds. Before long, Wang was one of the richest men in the city, but he always kept a seat free and a bowl of soup ready for anyone in need.

One day Tian returned. Wang hurried to greet him and brought him a delicious meal. “You have made me a rich and happy man,” Wang said. “How can I ever repay you?”

“Teach others to be as kind and generous to the poor as you have been to me,” said Tian. “That is my only wish.”

Hymns:

When the Saints Go Marching In, p. 17

How Great Thou Art, p. 18

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his to face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise, p. 30

[Score an orange peel with a knife or fingernails; while collecting hymnbooks and giving blessing, encourage people to smell the orange peel. Or give each person an unpeeled tangerine to peel and eat.]