

“Treasure (H)island”

The Gospel Lesson for today is read from Luke 12:32-40

Hear the words from the disciple, Luke:

Read Luke 12:32-40

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

“Thanks be to God”

Let us pray:

God of justice,

your word is light and truth.

Let your face shine on us to restore us,

that we may walk in your way,

seeking justice and doing good. Amen.

Everybody has a guilty pleasure – for me, it has to be the true crime genre. Who here loves true crime stories? Whether it be from podcasts like Serial or S-Town, or from TV shows like Forensic Files, Cold Case Files, or Dateline? Yea, me too. You name it, murders, missing people, con artists, I’m there, drawn in and intrigued. For me, it scratches that itch that leaves me questioning the human psyche, social relationships, and the legal system, while bearing in mind the fact that these are the lives of real people we’re talking about. Naturally, not all cases get solved and we are left with wondering why they’re not. With my work and our mutual belief I tend to always keep Scripture in mind when listening to the lives of the victims and perpetrators. So this morning I want to give you crime genre junkies your fix as I tell you this investigative story of my own, but as I tell it I want you to remember Jesus’ words from our gospel lesson, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” So let’s begin...

It’s March 30, 1968 two little boys are playing in a deserted East Village apartment at 371 East 10th St. New York and find the body of a dead man lying on a cot, with two empty beer bottles and religious pamphlets scattered on the ground. Medical

“Treasure (H)island”

examiners determined that the man had died from heart failure caused by an advanced hardening of the arteries, a condition common in long-term heroin addicts. There was no identification on the body, and the photos taken of the body were shown around the neighborhood, but yielded no positive identification. Believed to be an unclaimed and homeless person, he was buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave, where he remained unknown and unclaimed for about nineteen months. So who was he?

Nearly over a year and a half after the finding of this John Doe’s body, a woman in Los Angeles, California sought the help of officials to locate her lost son for a hoped-for reunion with his father, who was near death. This resulted in a successful fingerprint match at New York City’s Police Dept., which located her missing 31-year-old son as the same John Doe who was buried on the opposite side of the continent in New York City’s Potter’s Field on Hart Island. Bodies of unknown drifters are found every day. Few are ever identified – unless their deaths are “important.” So just who was this lost son now found? It turns out that it was none other than the infamous, Academy Award winning and first ever Disney child movie star actor, Bobby Driscoll. So how is it that Bobby Driscoll found himself go from the walk of fame to the walk of shame on a cot, alone, in an abandoned building?

Discovered by chance in 1943 at the age of five and a half in an Altadena, CA barber shop, Bobby Driscoll was a natural born actor. With his natural acting ability and talent for memorizing lines at a young age, he was quickly considered a “Wonder Child” around Hollywood and perfect for any boyhood role. With one major Hollywood studio recommendation after another, it was unsurprising that Walt Disney would eventually

“Treasure (H)island”

call little Driscoll, and place him as the first actor Disney ever put under a personal contract.

Driscoll's first role under Disney contract was as Johnny, the little boy who encounters Uncle Remus at his grandparents' Georgia plantation just after the Civil War and become mesmerized by tales of Br'er Rabbit and friends in the now controversial 1946 film *Song of the South*. The film turned him into an instant well known child star and was discussed for the juvenile academy award as best child actor of the year in 1947, but it was decided that no one would receive that award that year.

But it was no matter, Driscoll went on to play as the “boy who cries wolf” and witnesses a murder next door in the movie *The Window*, and also the eager treasure hunter Jim Hawkins in Walt Disney's version of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Disney's first completely live-action film. His performances in those box office international hits earned him a spot on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at the age of 12 and a deserving Oscar at the 1949 Academy Awards, further earning him the role of a life time as one of the well-renown and most notable characters in Disney history, the voice and animation model for *Peter Pan*. In his biography on Disney, Marc Elliot described Driscoll as the producer's favorite "live action" child star: "Walt often referred to Driscoll with great affection as the living embodiment of his own youth. However, during a project meeting following the completion of *Peter Pan*, Disney stated that he now saw Driscoll as best suited for roles as a young bully rather than a likeable protagonist."

Following *Peter Pan*, Driscoll was unable to find work in the movies. He received good reviews for some TV roles he had through the 1950s, but he could never get another break in films. After an unsuccessful attempt at a comeback Driscoll began getting into

“Treasure (H)island”

serious trouble with the law. He became the target of ridicule in High School for his previous film career and began to take drugs. He said later, “I tried desperately to be one of the gang. When they rejected me, I fought back, became belligerent and cocky, and was afraid all the time. I was 17 when I first experimented with the stuff. In no time I was using whatever was available... mostly heroin, because I had the money to pay for it.”

By 1961, Bobby was sentenced as a drug addict and court ordered to enter the Narcotic Rehabilitation Center of the California Institution for Men in Chino, CA. When Driscoll left Chino a year later, he was unable to find acting work. Rehabilitated and eager to make a comeback, Bobby was ignored by the very industry that once had raised and nurtured him, because of his record as a convict and former drug addict. Embittered by this, he said, "I have found that memories are not very useful. I was carried on a silver platter—and then dumped into the garbage.

First famous...now infamous, he repeatedly tried to revive his career and get back in the movies but with no luck he eloped to Mexico and was married, and began a family. By 1964, 2 years later, he returned, was divorced, depressed, and fed up with Hollywood. He moved to New York in 1965, only to learn that his reputation had preceded him, and no one wanted to hire him there, either. Alone, thoroughly dispirited and funds depleted Bobby Driscoll vanished off the face of the map. Two weeks after Bobby's father died in 1969, Mrs. Driscoll received a letter from the county clerk asking her to confirm Bobby's death. That's how she found out. A year and a half after it happened. They'd been able to trace him, finally, through fingerprints. He died the day before his mother's birthday. He had been hooked on heroin for seven years, but when he died, he was, as the coroner told her, “clean”. Found lying on a cot, with two empty beer bottles and religious pamphlets

“Treasure (H)island”

scattered on the ground in a deserted East Village tenement at 371 East 10th Street, not even a mile away from the location he filmed his oscar award winning movie *The Window* almost 20 years prior.

Who's to say what was going through Bobby Driscoll's mind the night he passed. Perhaps he was walking around the lower east side of Manhattan remembering the scenes he filmed nearly 20 years ago that put him at the highest point of his life and how far he had fallen since then. Maybe as he drank his mind drifted to his wife and children he left behind. Then maybe he thought about how his mom's birthday was tomorrow and how he wished he could strike up the courage to call her. Maybe his mind was on getting his next fix, or maybe it was on Jesus as he read from some religious pamphlets he picked up remembering how he used to go to church every Sunday and paid attention to his uncle who was a Baptist minister. Maybe all of these things happened in Bobby Driscoll's last moments. Maybe none of them did.

But what we can be sure of is that Bobby Driscoll had to make a choice in the things he treasured most in life, as we all do. What do we hold on to in our last moments? What are the things we treasure most in our lives that bring us joy? For us it may be family or friends we deeply care for, or perhaps our faith. For Bobby Driscoll the evidence points to either drugs or Jesus.

Everyday we make a choice in where we store our treasure, in ourselves or in others. Those who store up treasure in themselves will find no joy in this life, but those who store up treasure for others (by giving to the poor, taking care of widows and orphans) will find true joy in heaven. “where your treasure is, there your heart will be

“Treasure (H)island”

also.” And our hearts must be ready for Jesus because he will come for us at unexpected hour.

We shouldn't give ourselves to things that are less than God's best or surrender ourselves to the world values, because life is short.

Jesus' disciples haven't figured that out. They act like they have forever. They worry about the wrong things, they chase what's unimportant. They run around preoccupied with details, forgetting why they started doing what they're doing in the first place.

But Jesus knows the time is short. He's on his way to Jerusalem to die. There's a crowd of thousands gathering, but Jesus says this to his disciples, "Don't be afraid. You've been given the Kingdom. God has given you life itself. You don't have to be frightened. Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that doesn't need a bailout, a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being."

"Earthly possessions don't matter much when you realize that your whole life is in God's hands. God gives us eternity, so all the stuff in the world is unnecessary. Only God's treasures are worth clinging to."

God's pleasure is to give us God's presence. God wants this gift to be celebrated. God wants us to understand that through sorrows and trials, whatever comes, we're going to be okay.

“Treasure (H)island”

Christ calls us to amazing lives. Jesus tells the disciples to give up wanting more, share the wealth, be constantly awake for God's presence. Jesus describes a life of loving one's enemies, turning one's cheek, serving others.

God invites us to live in Christ's way, knowing that our sins are forgiven, knowing that despite what we might think of ourselves or what others might think about us, we are deeply loved by the one who created us. The value of our lives is not to be measured by our bank account, not by how we look, not by our standing in the community, not even by the amount of good we've done, but simply by this: that God values us highly enough to give us joy.

God calls us to be watchful for the ways in which joy is breaking in around us. Christ is always coming. The clouds are always descending. Stay alert to how God draws near in the mighty injustice that grabs our attention and begs for our passion. God draws near in the spiritual awakening that puts us in touch with a heart that we had forgotten we had. God draws near in the thing of beauty that reminds us that the world is more than just its ugliness. Who knows what form it will take, this reign of God that is always drawing near us? Be watchful for it. Look for it in the midst of the routines.

Wake up to whatever your life is bringing you. Wake up to pain because we can't be healed until we admit that we're hurt. Wake up to the love we won't let ourselves feel, because we're afraid our hearts will break. Wake up to the job we've been given-- watching for God's presence.

Wake up and understand that when we look for God, we hear the ticking of the clock and understand that every minute is filled with possibilities. Our job is to stay awake to everything that life brings us--so that we don't miss it when God comes.

“Treasure (H)island”

Let us pray:

God, you have given us life to cherish and celebrate. You take pleasure in sharing your presence with us. Show us what we need to do to accomplish your great mission of love.

Lead us to your eternal presence. Amen.

Offertory Prayer:

God of love and mercy, as we lift these gifts to you, too many of us are thinking, “We are done for another week.” Scripture reminds us that what you seek is so much more: “Do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” You seek our offering in our actions, making your love and compassion real. Help us to bring to you the fullness of the gifts that demand we live differently, that your kingdom might be here in our midst. We pray in Jesus’ blessed name. Amen.