



Reflection by Thomas Hargrove

Proper 25 | Matthew 22:34-46
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Thomas Hargrove became a devout Episcopalian even while working as a journalist in Birmingham, Alabama, and Washington, DC.

Upon retirement, he founded a nonprofit organization called the Murder Accountability Project to track unsolved homicides.

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Do you have a personal motto — a mantra, perhaps — that defines you and guides you?

I was a newspaper man for 37 years. One of my first major influences was a tough, burly, hard drinking and loud cursin' Scots-American editor who liked to snarl at his cub reporters: "Get it first. But first, get it right!" He was talking about the need for accurate reporting.

Good advice for young journalists, but hardly an aphorism to live by.

Jesus in today's Gospel was asked what are God's most important commandments. His answer was characteristically simple and profound: Give your heart, soul and mind to God. Love Him completely with all you have. And love your neighbors at least as much as you love yourself.

But what does it really mean to love the Lord "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind?" If we truly follow the Messiah, what does such love look like?

The Rev. Billy Graham has a pretty good method of determining our priorities. "A checkbook is a theological document; it will tell you who and what you worship," he has often said. Of course, Rev. Graham was paraphrasing Jesus who also told us that where our treasure is, there will our hearts be.

I spent decades working in the irreverent atmosphere of the modern newsroom. Yet the truth of Jesus' words even percolated to the press. How many times did I hear editors quote the famous Watergate-era advice to investigative reporters: "Follow the money!"

Actually, that phrase was not uttered by journalists Bob Woodward or Carl Bernstein or even editor Ben Bradlee. It was invented by a Hollywood screen writer. But it's come to be widely recognized as sage guidance to understanding the machinations of politics — track the flow of money to learn where it came from and where it goes.

It's the same in our personal lives, too.

After retirement from journalism, I find I'm still following the money. I became the Stewardship chairman at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Virginia. But I'm no longer looking for corruption and dirty dealing. Instead, the ministry of Stewardship helps turn our money into a fragrant offering to the Lord.

We come to know money only has value when used as a means of worship.

