

All of earth's gold comes from outer space. Astronomers now believe that massively dense stars – old stars - neutron stars – crashed into each other billions of years ago – forging gold from nothing.

Imagine that – as if by the voice of God, *let there be gold!* This gold made its way to earth on the backs of meteors across ba-zillions of light years, crashing into earth.

One astrophysist says we should call these stellar collisions – *blingnovas*.

Scripture frames it differently: *All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee*. Or, to twist one of the psalms, All the Gold is God's.

Pepper our cat is territorial – Most cats are. I'm sure you've heard stories of cats that after a family moves - somehow find their way home – sometimes across hundreds of miles, back to the old house.

Territorial, and there is an alley cat in our neighborhood, who thinks his territory is our yard – he sits on our back fence and screeches –like an owl, driving Pepper crazy. This is her turf, not his. Or his turf, not hers

Pepper and this stray get into fights, mean, eye-scratching fights.

Hummingbirds are the same way. Those adorable little birds that don exquisite green and ruby feathers and hover like helicopters. Fight just like cats. In Maryland, I placed a hummingbird feeder in the garden behind the screened porch, smack between two stands of tall hemlock trees. Hummingbirds built nests, one family in each stand of trees.

When one of the hummingbirds would visit the feeder, a hummingbird from the opposite nest would dive-bomb him – And vice versa – like Hatfields and McCoys, these little guys were Kamikazee pilots – gutsy, and mean! Territorial, and that is what I think about when I hear Jesus' story about the crafty steward. The guy is territorial. Yes, the estate belongs to the master, but – for whatever reason – the master has multiple estates, he is a remote landowner, or he is the shareholder of a large corporation and the steward is his executive - either way, the steward treats the estate as his own. That is why when he gets fired, he is arrogantly incredulous. *How dare the master treat me like this?* He retaliates like the kamikaze hummingbird. But what is unique is not that the guy reacts territorially – Jesus' take on the story is the unique part. He practically praises the steward – then advises us – *Make friends with dishonest gold – so when your gold is gone, your friends will welcome you ...* I cannot even begin to say whether Jesus is being sardonic, cryptic, cynical, or sarcastic. *make friends with dishonest wealth – so when it is gone, they will welcome you ...* But there is a point to be made, tucked into in Jesus' words: Despite its cosmic or eternal origins, even gold is impermanent. No matter who you are, you won't own your gold even one just like the steward – here today, gone tomorrow. Maybe that is why this guy goes all territorial, and uses the gold to achieve more *eternal* results.

Now people have been trying to use money to purchase a little bit of heaven for all of human existence. Urged on by the church! *Give to the church, save your soul*. Maybe this is why the Catholic Church is so wealthy, its annual budget exceeding \$170 billion – The Catholic Church even has its own little country –the Vatican.

Before we Episcopalians get too smug about the Catholic Church's wealth, let's not forget our own little nuggets of stored gold – Think Canterbury, or Trinity Wall Street, or even Grace Cathedral.

*The minister, Jim Henderson, wrote a book, *Jim and Casper Go to Church*. Jim wanted to take a non-church person – in this case, Matt Casper - with him to visit other churches to see how a non-believer might respond to church – an outsider's view of what works, and what doesn't. After they visited several churches, Casper turned to Jim and asked this simple question: *Is this what Jesus told you guys to do?*

Now, I don't know whether Casper was referring to the worship or the buildings or the narcissistic nature of preachers – But surely Casper's simple question should be the one we're asking, right? What is it Jesus told us to do, anyway? *Use dishonest wealth for eternal purposes!* He also said of money, *give it all away*, and although I am pretty sure he didn't mean that literally of everybody, You have to wonder, what would happen if the church – Catholic and otherwise – gave it all away? Sold it, cashed it in, and turned the liquid assets over to the poor? Talk about using wealth for an eternal purpose! Maybe this is what Jesus really meant when he advised, *store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where rust and moth do not corrupt?*

Life is impermanent, after all, temporal, bound by the crashing of stars and passing of time. *Here today and gone tomorrow*, And even though Jesus was talking about buildings when he said, not one stone will not be left – he must have been thinking equally of the human body – Not one cell upon another – So do not waste your gold on the body, spend it on the soul. It isn't what you have that counts, but what you do with it that counts.

Anthony de Mello tells the story of the sannyasi (Hindu wanderer/ascetic) who had just reached the edge of the village, and settled down for the night. A villager ran up to him and exclaimed, *The Stone. Give me the precious stone! What stone?* the sannysasi asked? Well – turns out that the night before an angel appeared to the villager in a dream, and told him to go to the outskirts of the village, where he'd find the sannyasi who would give him a precious stone, that would make him rich forever. Upon hearing this, the sannyasi rummaged through his bag, and pulled out a rock he had found – about this big.

He told the villager, *I found it on path a few days ago. You can certainly have it.* The villager took it, and gazed in wonder. The rock was the largest diamond in the world. He took the diamond home, but that night, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned, so finally, he got up, returned to the sannyasi – and begged of him, *Give me the wealth that makes it possible for you to give this diamond away so easily.*

Make friends for yourselves with your money – so you will have a place in heaven.