

SECOND READING: Matthew 6:19-21, 25-33 pg 6 NT

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. ⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

FIRST READING: 1 Peter 4:7-10 pg 235 NT

7 The end of all things is near;[d] therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Gathered and Sent: Stewards of the Kingdom”

They are words of Jesus. Very, very frequently, he speaks of this subject...over 1/3 of his parables, in fact. And I understand that 1 in 7 verses of the NT deal with the same topic too. Listen again. *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Another way Jesus might say this is *“Do not invest for yourselves in the things of the earth...but invest yourselves in the things of heaven...for where your investments are your heart will be also”*.

Why do you think Jesus puts so much of his precious time and energy into talking about this? And why is so much Scripture dedicated to the topic? Could it be because it’s important and because there is great challenge, danger even, to the human mindset and heart when the alluring alternative to investing ourselves in God is presented, that is, the alternative of material possessions, money, stuff? Yes. In fact, Jesus actually describes us as being somewhat *“suspended between two magnetic poles which pull at us two masters, one which is of God, and one which is not. ‘You cannot serve God and wealth’.”*¹ Note that Jesus does not speak against our possessions, per se. We certainly need some to survive. However, he is very clear that we must choose to whom we belong. And could it be that Jesus knows that where our investment lies, where our devotion is, God or stuff, determines how we ultimately live? Of course.

In his classic article, *“The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity”*, Walter Bruggemann,² says that *“Consumerism has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether we will give the gospel the power to help us withstand it.”* He tells of some friends of his who have a 4 yr old son. *The mother of the boy told him that she was needing to make a decision regarding which kindergarten to get him into because if she didn’t then he wouldn’t get into the right prep school. And that would mean he would not be able to get into Davidson College. And if he didn’t go to Davidson he wouldn’t be connected to the bankers in Charlotte and then he’d not get the kind of job which he needed to make a lot of money!*

¹Karl Jacobson. *“Commentary on Matthew 6:19-34”*. https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3712 (accessed 11/29).

² Walter Bruggemann, *“The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity.”* Christian Century. 1999: March; 24-31.

His friends' story is," Bruggemann says, "the Nike story!. He says that "according to the Nike story, whoever has the most shoes when he dies wins. In it, our beginnings are in our achievements, and we must create ourselves. The Nike story gives us a present tense of anxiety, fear, greed and brutality. It produces child and wife abuse, indifference to the poor, the buildup of armaments, divisions between people, and environmental racism. It tells us not to share or care about anyone but ourselves. ...and it is the prevailing creed of our American society."

Bruggemann goes on to review the Bible's story of abundance, of God's generosity to us and promise of provision and sustenance. Gen 1 begins as a song of praise, consistently reminding us how good it all is, so much so that God takes a day of rest from its fruitfulness. Israel then celebrates God's provision through the story of the blessing of Abraham and Sarah beyond their fathoming until such a time that Pharaoh in Egypt dreams there will be a famine and begins to monopolize the food supply, introducing the concept of scarcity into the world's economy. For the first time, someone says, *"There may not be enough. Let's get everything."* And in fact, when the crops fail and the peasants run out of food, they end up giving as collateral first their land, then their cattle and eventually themselves as slaves. And that's how the children of Israel become slaves, through an economic transaction, based on worry and fear of scarcity.

Yes, worry and the fear of scarcity. This is the way in which Jesus, centuries later, defines the tension between our devotion to God or to things. The tension is found in the attitude of worry. Worry about our food and drink, our clothing, worry about the bottom line that comes with those things, about not having enough to the point that we need to lay up more and more, to hoard and over-buy. Worry can threaten to separate us from God because it is grounded in a lack of trust in God's abundance, in God's providence and care of us. It's not a faithful act, worry. Jesus chastises the worriers: *"You of little faith!"* But a reorientation toward the treasure of heaven will change everything. It will allow us to care for our neighbors and the world. It will, as Karl Jacobson says, "blow our socks off".³ And when we begin to understand and really believe that we are children of a God who loved us into existence, that our lives will end in

³Karl Jacobson, *"Preaching Series of Stewardship & Generosity"* (1) http://www.workingpreacher.org/narrative_podcast.aspx?podcast_id=1041 (accessed 11/1/19).

God, and that this LOVE-LY well-being cannot be taken from us, then indeed we can begin to *invest in, to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.... For there our hearts will be.*

Ultimately, then, what Jesus is doing here when he places the question of devotion before us is to really think about our priorities. I've learned a good tool which can help us do this. A good tool to help us discern our priorities is to look at our calendars and see where our time is going, to look at our bank statements and see where our money is going, and to look at our lives and see where our energy is going. If these are not going toward the things of God, (who first loved us) well, we need be concerned about that and make some changes. And we all need make adjustments from time to time, big & small. But the great news is that there's still time to change. We can all of us still exchange our earthly treasure for treasure in heaven!

Back in 2002, much of the European money suddenly became worthless because 12 European countries adopted the Euro. Many countries elected to have grace periods, phasing in the new currency, but Germany set a deadline of Jan 1, 2002 wherein the Deutsch Mark was no longer legal tender. (pause) Let's imagine that you and I are all of us right now German citizens, and it is December 2001. Let's imagine that we have all saved a lot of Deutsch Marks. We've stored these treasures up and we are quite devoted to them. We're not going to let go of them, no matter what the Government says! So, we refuse to go to the bank and exchange them for the new Euros. When Jan 1, 2002 comes...and it does come...well. Guess what! All of our Deutsch Marks are worthless. Everything we've stored up is worthless.⁴ In the same way, the day is coming when all our treasure on earth will be worthless. It'll perish. So, while we yet live, we need make certain that we are working to exchange the treasure that we are tempted to store up on earth, the perishable for treasure in heaven, and we need live for the non-perishable.

When we take the time to nurture relationships with family, with friends, fellow children of God...listening to them, comforting them when they are grieving, supporting them when they are afraid, surrounding them when they are lonely, gently guiding them when they are lost or forgiving them when they wrong, asking forgiveness when we've offended....when we do these

⁴Claude Kayler. "Where is Your Treasure?" <https://www.mainstreetumc.org/sermons/the-treasure-where-is-your-treasure/> (accessed 11/1/19).

things we are storing up treasures in heaven. When we reach out and care for those in need, for those who are sick or hungry, or afraid because they have no place to sleep or afraid because they may not be able to keep their children safe, or find a job or might be mistreated by their spouse or their parent when they go home, or so many other sufferings....when we do these things we are investing in the things of heaven. When we take the time to listen to or mentor one of God's children, or improve the life of one of God's creatures or heal some of the God's damaged creation, we are living lives for the non-perishable. When we study God's word with others, or work to make God's house a beautiful and welcoming place, especially to the stranger or the outcast, or the lost, and when we gather to praise and worship the Almighty with our song and prayers together, we are investing in the heavenly life already.

Friends, while, FPC-CC is not a large congregation, it is a growing congregation and as I heard said this week a "mighty one". Small but mighty! I firmly believe it is this because God is blessing us. I believe God is blessing us because we are working hard to follow the Spirit's lead in being the place where investments are being made in heavenly treasure. We have prayed for the Spirit to move in our midst and wow, can't you feel it? The Spirit is here...guiding us, empowering us, growing us and transforming lives right in front of our eyes. All the investments I just described are being done through the energy of God's Spirit in and through YOU. Sometimes it almost makes my knees a little weak. The Session thanks you for making this the place, by your presence, by your gifts of time and talent and money, where you have stored up your heavenly treasure. We thank you. And we pray that you will continue to do so, even the more...even the more in the coming year.

It is important thing. It is critically important thing...and not just for FPC-CC, but for the quality of each of our lives, now and always. Jesus knows this. And this is why he spends so much time on this word. It is out of his great love for us that he wants us to choose wisely. "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Amen.