

# **Trinity United Methodist Church**

**February 23, 2020**

**“No U-Hauls at Funerals”**

**Pastor Dan Elmore**

## **Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24**

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

## **Sermon**

Would you pray with me? Oh Lord, open our ears and our hearts. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

There is the story about a pastor who began preaching a sermon one Sunday, and he happened to be preaching about money. And in the back of the sanctuary he noticed a young mother who started to cry. He could tell because she was dabbing at her eyes. Then he noticed that she began to really openly weep, and he thought, “Hmm, something must be going on in her life that she’s struggling with.” Soon enough, those around her started crying and dabbing at *their* eyes and wiping tears away. And just as he began to really make his point about giving back to the Lord financially, the whole sanctuary full of people started just absolutely weeping and wailing, with tears just flowing, and he thought to himself, “My, what a movement of the Holy Spirit! The whole congregation is being convicted of these spiritual truths that I’m laying down this

Sunday!” Until *his* eyes started to burn. And it became a burning sensation like no other. *He* started to cry, and finally someone said, “We’ve got to get out of here!” And so everyone ran out of the church, and he tracked down that young mother and said, “What in the world happened in there?” She said, “I’m so sorry. My young toddler son got into my purse and grabbed hold of my can of mace and started going to town with it all over the place, and evidently it got sucked into the air vents and spread throughout the room this morning.” And the preacher then realized...some congregations will do *anything* to get out of hearing a sermon about money.

So when we hear this text from Jesus this morning about storing up treasures in heaven and not on earth, we might figure that it’s a sermon about money. Well, let me go ahead and give you maybe the good news: This is *not* a sermon about money, or *just* money. Is there an “amen” in the house? (At 8:30, nobody gave me an “amen.” I was like, all right, fine, I’ll preach on money. Let’s go!)

To be sure, Jesus speaks of money, of possessions, of treasures. He says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, where thieves break in and steal.” But you see, in Jesus’ day—we’ve got to put ourselves in that time period again—earthly riches and earthly treasure were their primary measurement of how much they were blessed in life. Of how much they were living a *righteous* life, how *good* they were being in God’s eyes. And so the more righteousness that you earned by doing all of the laws in the Old Testament and their Scripture, the more riches you were rewarded. And the inverse was true as well. If you found yourself in poverty, in sickness or with some disease, those things were condemned as unrighteous, and you must have done something to earn those things, as well. See the Book of Job as Exhibit A with this. God says look at Job, he’s the most righteous man on earth, and Satan says let me have at him and takes away everything. And one of the things that Job’s friends say to him to try to comfort him is, “Come on, Job. You must have done *something* to earn this curse.”

But all of the reward that you would get was focused in this life. For also, they didn’t really have this concept of heaven that we do today. For when you died, you went to Sheol, which is the place of the dead. And the closest thing that they had to heaven was to lie in Abraham’s bosom, the most righteous man there in the place of the dead, but everybody was gathered together there in the place of the dead to wait for the Messiah to come in the final resurrection.

So there was no significance for heavenly treasure versus the visible reality of earthly treasure. So what in the world is Jesus talking about, then? You see, the longstanding belief was that salvation is dependent on everything that we do, and we know that we’re saved by how much we have to show for it. “Oh, look at my 401(k). I’m really good to go in heaven,” right? “Look at the car that I drive. Look at the house that I

live in. I'm really good to go in heaven." That was the attitude of the day, the belief of the day. But Jesus is here flipping it on its head, to say no, it's not that way at all. Salvation is found by believing in faith alone and the things of the kingdom. That's where salvation is. Believing in eternal life, believing in joy, in peace, in light and love.

Jesus here isn't saying you shouldn't have wealth. He's saying check your attitude, the attitude of your heart toward your earthly possessions. If our hope and our security is found in our earthly possessions, we're in trouble. If our evidence of our righteousness is found in our earthly treasure, even in a bank vault somewhere, then our sense of a secure relationship with God is subject to being shattered at any moment. For instance, how did you feel when the stock market was last really tanking in '08? Not good, right? But that should show you, maybe, where your heart really, really lies. Because our attitude about our money is symptomatic of that larger issue. What's going on inside our heart.

Jesus talks in the middle of this passage about eyes and about sight. If your eyes are healthy, you're full of light; if your eyes are unhealthy, you're full of darkness. Certainly that is literally true, but of course, Jesus is talking spiritually here. The question is, how do we see ourselves? And we have to even be careful with *that*, because our eyes can deceive ourselves.

And even then, we don't have to have all that much earthly wealth and earthly reward to fall into this trap, because our earthly reward might come in other ways. The awards that we receive, the accolades that we get, the compliments that we get. There's other ways we try to earn our righteousness, maybe by acts of service. Maybe by great worship attendance, every Sunday. Maybe by teaching Sunday school or singing in the praise band or the choir, things like that. Maybe giving a tenth of our money back to God in a full tithe. And you might say, "Well, wait a minute, Pastor. Aren't these things you *want* us to do? You don't want my tithe? Fine, I'll keep it to myself." No, absolutely, those are things that we should be doing. But we have to keep even those things in the proper place in our lives.

Elsewhere, Jesus is watching the Pharisees and scribes as they are putting their tithe into the temple deposit box, and it was a very public thing. The Pharisee walks in with his check held high in the air, maybe one of those *Price Is Right*-sized checks, right? And he goes up like, "Look at me!" and puts it in. And then the widow with just her two small coins goes in very timidly, and she's very embarrassed because she doesn't have one of those *Price Is Right*-sized checks. She drops in her two coins. And Jesus says, "*She's* more righteous than that guy is," because of the attitude of her heart.

John Wesley, in his early years, became a missionary to Georgia. And he thought he was something, that he was going to go convert these "heathens" in Georgia, all

these Native Americans there especially. And Georgia, if you know your history, was started as a debtor's colony. Talk about some heathens! People that owed money. Very unrighteous people, right? So I'm going to go convert all these people, he thought. But when he came back to England as a failure, he wrote in his journal, "I went to America to convert the Indians. But oh, who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of mischief? I have a fair summer religion."

I know what that's like a little bit. Around 10 years ago or so at this point, our Virginia Conference had a strong emphasis on church planting. We wanted to plant as many new churches as possible in our Conference. And every year they would parade the church planters up on stage at Conference and say, "These are our new church planters," and everybody would go, "Yay!" And they got all this recognition, and church planting was *cool*. Church planting was sexy, right, because you could wear trendy clothes and you didn't have the trappings of established, existing churches that always complained, "Well, we've never done it that way before." It's a new church. *Nobody's* done it that way before! Right?

So as I went through that process, I kept going, "Ooh, ooh, pick me! Pick me! I want to do this! Please, yeah, I want to do it!" And they picked me, eventually. And I realized that church planting is not cool. Church planting is one of the hardest things to do in the world. If you've ever started your own business, it's something akin to that. And I figured out that church planting isn't really my calling; that what I really wanted was to be cool. To be able to go up on stage and have people go, "Yay, Dan!" and all of those kinds of things. And deep down inside, in hindsight, I realize that what I was also after was gaining greater recognition from God Himself.

Friends, that's the point of Jesus' saying for today. We *can't* gain any greater recognition or acceptance or love from God than He's already given each and every one of us. He's already loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us, to raise Him to life so that when we believe in Him we have eternal life with Him as well. We get that eternal reward because of what Jesus has done for us, not because of anything we do for ourselves. And that eternal reward is not streets of gold and mansions and endless buffets with no calories and endless rounds of golf or baseball with no fatigue. Our ultimate eternal reward is living and worshiping in the presence of God Himself, face to face with the King of Glory, worshiping around the throne with other saints who have gone on before us and will come after us. And none of the "stuff," of the money, of the accolades, of the titles, that we acquire here will transfer to there. There are no U-Hauls at funerals. We can't take it with us.

So I feel like another way to paraphrase Jesus here is to enjoy the good gifts of God in this life, but invest in the Kingdom. Jesus ends with a warning. He says, "You can't serve two masters. Because whichever master you serve determines for whom

you live and how you live. It determines where all of your passion and focus and energy and commitment go. And the more that we serve “stuff,” the more that we serve wealth and money, the more we will never have enough. There will always be more we have to do to get more. But the more we serve God, the more we seek grace, we will always have more than enough.

We can’t go back and forth between the two, though. Jesus says it’s got to be one or the other, or you will despise the one and be devoted to the other. Enjoy the good gifts of God in this life, but make sure you’re investing in the Kingdom.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, when we will gather in the sanctuary at 7. I hope you’ll join us for Ash Wednesday service. I always love Lent. It’s not the happiest time of year, especially as we focus on penitence and seeking forgiveness and giving things up. But Lent for me, and I hope for you, too, can be a time to reboot. You’ve heard it said when all else fails—on a computer, right?—just reboot the thing. Do a hard reset on your phone when it starts acting up. Do a control-ALT-delete and restart. And that is Lent for us year after year after year.

But Lent is also a time to reinvest. To take stock of where our hearts lie and where we might reinvest as we build equity in the Kingdom of God. Yes, we give up some things, and maybe we might give up some aspect of our earthly treasure. It might be financial in some way, if the Holy Spirit calls you to do that. It might be just giving up some way that we love to spend our time, and we realize, “Wow, that’s actually wasting a good bit of time. I could be reinvesting that time in kingdom purposes instead.”

But it’s also to examine where your heart is, and we do that through a recommitment to our spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting, of commitment to worship and a means of grace, a means by which we can count on God showing up in our lives.

And then once we’ve done that, it’s not just a personal thing, but it’s also a corporate thing, as we might invest then in someone else as well. Help them to learn to love and serve the right master. And always, to ask ourselves, how are your investments doing? Where is your treasure? Where is your heart?

Thanks be to God. Amen.