

Jesus Is Preaching Sermon Series
Full Service Faith - Matt. 6:19-24
Feb. 5, 2023
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What do you collect? I'm guessing most of us in here are collectors of something. It's a peculiar trait of this strange species of animal called human beings, isn't it? We like to collect things. Anything. Everything. Stamps, baseball cards, cream pitchers, cars, rubber bands, bourbon. We are, by nature, collectors. Why else did God create flea markets?

In college I started collecting sports memorabilia called Starting Lineups. They were about six-inch-tall figurines of professional athletes. My wife called them my dolls, to which I took great offense and said, "They are not dolls, they are action figures." I became obsessed with my Starting Lineup collection. My friend Erik and I would scour the local toy stores looking for the latest batch of Starting Lineups. We knew the store workers by first name and had the Starting Lineup shipping schedule memorized. When we found a new one for our collection you'd think we had just stumbled upon the Holy Grail in aisle 3 of Target.

Because my collection was so close to my heart, I wanted to show it off. Specifically, I wanted to cover a wall in our house with my Starting Lineups. Surprisingly, that idea was shot down. But I was told I could display them in one room: the tiny half-bathroom. OK, it wasn't quite the space over the mantel, but I made the most of it. So, I covered the walls of that bathroom with these sports figures. It was wall-to-wall athletes. My uncle Mark said that when he used that bathroom in there, he felt like he was being watched.

My justification for the expense of this collection was that it was an investment. Each Starting Lineup I bought represented a down payment on something bigger down the road, because as they got older, the action figures would increase in value, until I could sell my collection one day and pay for our daughters' college or our second home on the beach. With each Starting Lineup purchase, I was storing up treasures.

Turns out, I wasn't the only one doing this. Apparently, a lot of other sports fans/collector nerds were making the same investment, because the market became flooded with Starting Lineups, to the point that their value plummeted. I now have a few containers full of plastic sports dolls that are probably aren't worth more than the cheap plastic used to make them. So much for my investment.

I should have listened to Jesus on this one when he said, "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth." This saying comes in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount, which is the focus of our sermon series. Jesus is teaching his disciples – and us – about what it means to live for God's kingdom first. What does it look like to strive to be who God created us to be? Jesus teaches about things like fasting and prayer and following the commandments and not judging others. And in the midst of those teachings, we have these verses about treasures and hearts and eyes and wealth.

It may seem strange at first for Jesus to interrupt his teaching about spiritual things to toss in a disclaimer about financial things. Why would Jesus interrupt his sermon to remind his followers about their pledges? Because for Jesus, there was no separation between the spiritual and the financial. He didn't draw two circles, one for the

spiritual and one for everything else. He drew one big circle around everything and said, "It's all spiritual. It's all a matter of faith." Jesus is much more interested in our hearts than our wallets, but he knows how our hearts work, so he has to talk about our wallets.

It was a message his followers needed to hear, because they were just as susceptible to the seduction of materialism as we are. Jesus warns them about earthly treasures that could be destroyed by moth and rust. In ancient times, a person's wealth and status often consisted of fine and elaborate clothes. Clothing was seen as an investment. The word "rust" is better translated "eating away," and was probably a reference to the way mice and other vermin could sneak in and eat food supplies of farmers. And of course, anything that was owned was a potential target of thieves.

Before we try to understand what Jesus is saying to us, let's make sure we understand what he's not saying. First, Jesus is not saying don't own things. He's not saying we should all downsize to a tiny house and only acquire possessions through bartering. He's also not saying it's wrong to provide for the future. He's not saying businesses shouldn't make a profit or that all wealthy people can't be faithful followers. Jesus is not condemning working hard and earning money and owning things.

So what IS he saying? Jesus is saying be careful where you invest your money, but more importantly, he's saying be careful where you invest yourself. He is encouraging us to step back and ask ourselves why we do what we do and why we make the choices we make. Too often we take action without thinking through why we're doing what we're doing, including spending money. So, for Jesus, it's a question of priority. To what are we giving priority? It's one thing to buy a car; it's another to give it priority. It's one thing to collect action figures; it's another to obsess over them and decorate your bathroom with them. To what do we give priority? Jesus says if we give it priority with our pocketbook, then we give it priority in our hearts, as well.

Money is a necessary and vital part of our existence. But it is always a means to an end. What is the end? Money can buy pleasure, but it cannot buy happiness. Money can buy a bed, but it cannot buy a good night's sleep. Money can buy books, but it cannot buy wisdom. Money can buy friends, but it cannot buy friendship. Money can buy a house, but it cannot buy a home. Money is a means to an end, and Jesus is reminding us that the end for us should be serving God and making God's kingdom real here on earth.

Here at Crestwood, we have a healthy budget which we use for a variety of things, like paying the light bill and buying Sunday School supplies and paying our staff. But we do those things in service to our mission, which is to connect people to God and each other. Turning on the lights allows us to open the building to outside groups, buying Sunday School supplies helps us teach children and youth about the love God has for them, paying our staff enables them to use their gifts to serve God and this congregation. And let's not forget our commitment to outreach and putting our dollars to use outside of these walls. "Store up for yourself treasure in heaven." Jesus tells us that we have divine bank account, and each time we invest in the work of God's kingdom, we make a deposit, and one of the ways we do that is through the church, the local evidence of God's kingdom here on earth.

That's where I think the church in general often gets it wrong. The argument for giving usually boils down to something like this: We have this many members and this big a budget, so your fair share is this much and we need it to keep the doors open. Wow,

that's exciting, huh? How inspiring! I don't pay enough bills at home, so I think I'll pay the church's bills, too.

Jesus isn't telling us to do our duty and give away a portion of our money to support God's work. He's challenging us to look deep inside to see what motivates us, what inspires us, where our hearts are. The weird statement about the eye being the lamp of the body stems from the ancient belief that, rather than taking in light, the eye projected light onto the object on which it was focusing. Think about the statement, "I've got my eye on that sports doll." Jesus is saying that what you shine your light on can influence your whole life. The Message says it this way: "Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a musty cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!"

Jesus brings this home with his stark either-or statement about who we serve. He knows the reality is that choice is not if we serve, but who we serve, because we all serve someone or something. We can live for God's kingdom or we can live for what this world offers us, but Jesus says we can't do both. Really? I feel like I can love God and love the good things of this world, but if I'm honest with myself, the good things always end up taking priority over God. God gets me for an hour on Sunday, this world gets the rest of me. Bu God doesn't want part of us, God wants all of us, our full-service faith.

Jesus isn't telling us not to make and spend money, but he is challenging us by asking where our trust is. Because if our trust is in something in this world – our bank account, our investments, our phone, our house – all of that is susceptible to being taken away or lost. We know the volatility of the market, the crisis of unexpected bills, the unreliability of technology. If those things are the source of our joy, our hope, our connection, then we are serving something other than God. But when we use our resources to invest in God's kingdom – through how we use our time, our energy, our money – we are making an investment that lasts an eternity and will never diminish in value.

It's not against God to make money, to spend money, to invest money. But we should constantly ask ourselves, "Where is our priority? Where is our heart?" Are we holding onto our things with closed fists, or are we holding them loosely, ready to open our hands to share what we have to do God's work in this world? God has given us so much, entrusting us to care for those gifts and use them wisely. Think about how you spend your money. What is your priority? Who do you serve? Where is your heart?