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Text: Matthew 6:19-21, Genesis 11:1-9, 2 Peter 3:10-14, Matthew 19:16-30

Date: March 22, 2017

Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church Lent Midweek

Treasures in Heaven

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We can accumulate a lot of “stuff” in this world. Not only clothes, but furniture, toys, cars, houses, tools, plants, paper, books, letters, computers, pens, pencils, artwork, knickknacks, souvenirs, appliances, dishware, electronics—the list goes on. And a lot of this “stuff” has special meaning for us.

So in many ways, we can sympathize with the rich young man in Matthew 19 who went away sad when Jesus told him he had to sell everything he had to follow Jesus. It is hard to give up the things of the world that we hold so dear. But there is a distinction that needs to be made here. The Bible is not saying here “Get rid of everything!” This exchange reveals that the rich young man was still holding on a little too tightly to his possessions to devote his life to Christ.

So we are not saying here that it is bad to have a lot of things or to want nice things around you. The point of the story is that we as followers of Christ must make sure that the things of this world are not taking away our primary focus on Christ. Christ needs to be our number-one priority, not the things we have on this earth. This can be hard sometimes. Some people like to collect things and want to have the very best possessions. They want these things so that they look good in the eyes of others. This motivation for nice things can make it difficult to put their worldliness aside. It makes the task to focus their attention on Christ is nearly impossible. It is like trying to get camel through the eye of a needle, Jesus says.

The cross of Christ is a stark reminder to us all. A reminder that we can't take anything of this world with us when we die. We must cling to Christ and his salvation if we hope to ever have life in heaven. His life is what gives our life meaning, and not what we have or don't have.

Once we come to understand that, our approach to the things of this world changes. Clothes become not only something that we enjoy wearing. Clothes are something that we can, in Christ-like love, share with those who are poor or less fortunate than us. Food becomes not only something delicious to eat. Food is something we can donate to a food pantry to those who are hungry, serving them in their need, as Christ did.

We all know the saying, "You can't take it with you." That statement is true, but in the meantime, we can use what God has given us in this world to bring the love of God to those around us. God has given you what you have, and you can use it to serve others.

Our motivation should always be to bring glory to God with our possessions, not glory to ourselves. That was what was wrong with what was happening in Genesis at the Tower of Babel. The people were getting too full of themselves and built a tower as a testament to what they could do. They had forgotten about God. We fall into the same trap today.

But there is hope, our Gospel assures us, for all of us are sometimes guilty of putting Christ behind our possessions. "With God, all things are possible," Jesus says. He makes it possible. Possible by passing through this earth, dying on the cross for our many worldly sins. By opening a way for us through the empty tomb of Easter to live in heaven with him. Where we will focus on him eternally.

So during this Lent, open up your closets and pantries and face the reality that you really don't have to have everything that is in those places. Then consider what you can give away to church or a local charity as an expression of the life Christ has given you on the cross. Don't just give away those clothes that you can't wear anymore but donate something that you might miss a little. Don't just donate the food that has gone stale but something that might be your favorite food. That pang of parting with this special possession will be a good reminder to you to loosen up on your grip of worldly goods and hold on tighter to the message of the cross.

In Matthew 6, Jesus talks about treasures. What you treasure speaks volumes about who you. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

So what heavenly treasures are you storing up for yourselves this Lent? It's a good time to start building a stockpile of forgiveness, possessing merciful and gracious attitudes toward others. Other possessions to hang on tightly to are faith in Christ. Trust in the promise that when this world comes to an end, he has a place prepared for us in heaven. We possess the greatest gift of all, the gift of love—love for God, love for Christ and love for our neighbor. The depth of our love will never match the depth of the love that Christ had for us when he went to the cross for us. But as we draw closer to the Last Day, our love will build up inside of us through Christ. In this way we will grow closer to Christ and in the end we will possess the crown of life, which we wear for all eternity. One that neither moth nor rust will destroy. What a treasure that will be! Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21