

July 31 2016 NKPC

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. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, ^[c] your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, ^[d] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ “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.

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” ¹⁵ Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ²¹ “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

The other morning in Belmont on my way to the church, I saw a sign on the side of the road pointing toward an estate sale. "Heirlooms!" The sign proclaimed. For a couple of seconds I resisted. I thought, "Nah, I am not going to take the time to stop." But then I rationalized it to myself, "But what if I find a deal on a rug for my office?" So I found myself turning, and then parallel parking among a bunch of cars on the side of the road and trudging up a lovely curved driveway to an absolutely gorgeous house set on a hill. Sitting in front of the home was a practically new John Deere tractor that it looked it had only been gently used for yard work. (The sign said that it was a 2008 and they wanted \$15,000 for it.) Inside the beautiful home there was a lot of high end Ethan Allen furniture and the place was hopping with people who were circling like a flock of seagulls snatching up deals. There was a maple dining table set with six chairs that was worth over \$2,000 marked at \$350 that two ladies were looking at and a dark brown sectional sofa that a mother and daughter were discussing. A grill, a fish tank, linens, dishes, curtains, Christmas decorations and artwork were all set out like lost children looking for someone new to adopt them and take them home to cherish them. As I watched someone's beloved household being dismantled, and all of those treasures that they had painstakingly collected being sold off, I was reminded of the question from

our scripture passage today. "Who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" --It seems that in this case, the person who got the treasures was the person who got to the estate sale first. --It isn't as if that when we die we can take anything with us.

The message in our passage today is a simple one but it is a very hard one for all of us to hear. Everyone loves to have nice things. Everyone loves to have a comfortable place to live, a nice nest full of items that make your heart sing and that bring a smile to your face. We love to have beautiful clothes to wear, and nice vehicles to drive and to collect our beloved knick knacks, heirlooms and mementos. All of us can get so very attached to our stuff. --But the truth is that while we may want it, while we may buy it and love it and may never want to get rid of it, that **someday all of us will get rid of everything.** And we may not like the hear that some of the things that we hold so tight unto and treasure and prize are actually considered worthless.

Last Monday, I had a tour of the *North Kent Community Services* building by Claire Guisfredi, their Executive Director. She showed me the warehouse where they sorted all of the donated stuff that came in to them. Palettes of donated food, clothing and household items were stacked

everywhere. --It was obvious that they were running out of space. When I asked her if we as a church could give them everything that didn't sell at our fall church rummage sale, Claire sadly shook her head. "No, we have found that if it doesn't sell at your rummage sale, that it won't sell here. Then it is junk, and all it would do would fill up our dumpsters so that we have to pay to get rid of it. --We will take any leftover clothes though. We can sell those and can get up to 17 cents a pound for them as rags."

I admit that I was a little bit shocked about so many treasures ultimately ending up in the dumpster, but I shouldn't have been. I knew that we throw away a staggering amount of stuff every year. I looked it up and in Michigan in 2015, we added over 47 million cubic yards of solid waste to our landfills. --Almost 11 million cubic yards of that trash were imported here from other states and from Canada. If we change nothing in Michigan and keep creating and importing trash at this same rate, we will be completely out of landfill space in 27 years. -- It is literally a terrible waste. We want and we buy, and we want and we buy, and we spend our whole lives saying, "Gimme, Gimme, Gimme" and collecting more and more stuff, and then when we are gone from this earth, the majority of what we have spent our lives accumulating will just end up in a landfill.

--And all of that stuff that we have isn't just a burden to our families and friends to sort through once we are gone, it is often a burden to us now. When we buy something, when we take it into your home, that thing not only has its initial price tag, it also has the added weight of being something that we are responsible for. That thing also kind of owns us. -- We have to shelve it or else trip over it, and then we have to remember that we have it and where we put it. Often we have to clean it or maintain it or put gas or batteries or electricity in it. We have to keep other people, especially small children, safe around it and we have to make the time to use it or enjoy it. All of the stuff that we have, all of the things that we have and enjoy ultimately can take a lot of time and energy away from us. It can be a big distraction from the other things that we feel called to do here on earth. --And so we have to ask ourselves, is it worth it? Is this item that I am going to spend time and money and energy on something that is going to matter in a few years when I am dead and gone to heaven to be with Jesus?

Marie Kondo is the Japanese decluttering and tidying up expert. Her books and method of dealing with our stuff has taken off and created a movement among people who have too much stuff, which is almost all of

us. Even when she was a little girl, instead of wanting to go outside with her class for recess, Marie was most happy when she was organizing the shelves of her classroom library or secretly organizing the custodian's closet. Now as a grownup she has written a book and has made a career out of helping people declutter, tidy up and to make their spaces full of happiness and joy. What she recommends is that instead of tackling one room or one closet or one drawer of the house, that you tackle categories of things instead. You start with the items to which you have the least amount of emotional attachment and then work your way up to the items that have more emotional punch. She suggests that you start with clothes, since our emotional attachment to an old t shirt is usually a lot less than say our photographs. You gather all of that type of item from the whole house and then you hold each item in your hands and you ask yourself this simple question. **Does this item spark joy in me?** This question cuts through a lot of the other emotions and reasons that we keep stuff. Are we keeping that shirt because we love the color or we love the memories that it sparks from that vacation we took, or are we keeping it out of guilt because it is still perfectly good or because someone we love gave it to us, even though we think that it is only OK? Are we keeping all of those half completed projects around because we were taught to finish what we started, or can we face

up to the fact that doing that particular thing isn't fun for us anymore? Can we admit that there could be someone else out there who would love those supplies or that project? If we really get honest with ourselves, we need a whole lot less stuff than we typically have. And often we "save" our good stuff and we never use it because we are always reaching for our "good enough", just ok, everyday items. But what if we actually only kept and used the items that we love? --What if we were so bold that we could allow ourselves to eat our dinners off of our good china and what if we decided that it would be ok if we wore our favorite shirt so often that we would wear it out? What if we could let go of the stuff that does not make our hearts sing and with gratitude and joy give much of our stuff away to someone else who needs it?

What if being our a disciple of Jesus Christ was filled with the joy of "I want to give this to you" instead of the selfish, "Gimme" more and more that we are constantly brainwashed with? --What if we decided that what really truly matters in this life is the love of God and the love of others and the quality of those relationships instead of our love and our pursuit and our keeping up with all of our stuff?

My friends, in the end, this is what it all boils down to. There isn't a single item in this world that we can take along with us when we die. **The only thing that that really matters isn't a thing at all.** It is our relationship with Jesus, it is our relationship with our families and friends, it is the love that we have grown together as a fellowship of believers that will last for eternity and will ultimately give us eternal joy. Today, are we willing to open our hands and to let go of all of our stuff so that we can open your arms to the love of Christ that ultimately changes the world? I pray that we will. So be it. Amen.