

**Making Purses that Don’t Wear Out**

**August 7, 2016**

**Luke 12:32-40**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who bids us to not worry, Jesus Christ, Our Savior and Lord, Amen.

I have a confession to make. I like to shop. Some of you might think that’s not a very masculine thing, but I’m an admitted shopaholic. I do most of the shopping for our household needs like cleaning supplies and groceries, but my shopping goes further than that. I have been known to call it “retail therapy.” You know, that’s when you’re feeling down and out and so to make yourself feel better you just go out and buy yourself something. For some reason this week I decided I needed a new wallet. I must have spent 10 minutes at the BX on Monday looking at every wallet they had to offer. None of them suited me. When I got home I looked in my dresser and discovered I already owned almost every style of wallet that was for sale at the BX. So, I picked out the one I liked the best and guess what, I have a “new” wallet.

The thing is, all my wallets are about half worn out. I like to think they’re just getting broken in, but the truth is I should throw away some of those worn out wallets in my dresser. I wonder what kind of a purse or wallet Jesus was talking about when he advised the disciples to make purses for themselves that don’t wear out. Apparently he never bought any of the wallets for sale today… They’re all made in China and as far as I know, nothing made today, whether made in China or right here in the good ol’ USA, is going to last forever…

I’m pretty sure Jesus wasn’t talking about the actual purse used to hold the disciples cash reserves. He was referring to what’s inside the purse itself. In fact, his advice was dealing with an even broader subject than money. He was talking about the sum total of all of our possessions. This teaching moment of Jesus on stewardship of our possessions follows directly after the one last week where Jesus advised his disciples to watch out for all kinds of greed. Today’s Gospel text, like last week, also helps us understand what a satisfied life might look like. Treasure built up in heaven doesn’t run out. It can’t be stolen and it certainly doesn’t rust away. You don’t even have to wipe it with that new recolor wipe stuff they’re advertising on TV for $19.95.

So, how can we all live a more satisfied life? Is there any hope that my retail therapy sickness can be cured? Those are big and deep questions I probably can’t answer in a 12-minute sermon, but I can offer you some hope. For one thing I discovered this week that once again the bible translators misled us when they translated the Greek into English. The phrase “it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” is translated in the present tense as if it were happening now, but when I looked at the Greek I discovered it’s actually written in the past tense. In other words, it should say, “it was the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” God has already given us every good gift and blessing, if only we would receive them and take hold of the blessings we already have. Blessings like Grace, love, mercy, forgiveness, and joy. Can any of these be bought at the nearest Rural King or even at Walmart?

This is such an interesting Gospel lesson, for one thing Jesus tells us not to continue being afraid, because the Father has already given us His kingdom, everything God has is ours. In the very next verse we’re commanded by Jesus to become givers ourselves. The way I see God’s economy it goes something like this. God gives to us so we can give to others. Jesus says we’re to give alms to the poor. It’s again interesting to look at the Greek word we have translated as giving alms. The true sense of the word really means more like showing mercy. So many times we think we can just throw some money at a problem and we’re absolved of any further responsibility. That’s not what Jesus says though. Showing mercy comes from the heart as much or more than it does from the wallet. It has to do with compassion and love. Any monetary or material gift that isn’t accompanied by compassion and love is nothing more than a clanging gong or a noisy cymbol according to Saint Paul. I see a direct relationship between this type of alms giving and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Without God’s Word and promise of love and mercy, Baptism is nothing more than a sprinkling of water and Communion no more than a bite of stale bread and a sip of mediocre wine. However, when combined with God’s Word, the promise of eternal life, with God’s self-sacrificing love, and with his forgiving mercy, we have the two best gifts anyone could receive. It works the same way when we give alms to the poor. Without our love and mercy, it’s just money. Oh, sure it might solve an immediate problem like keeping the electricity on or food on the table, but there’s no lasting benefit. On the other hand, when our gifts are combined with our love, mercy, and compassion, we enter into a relationship and that does change both the giver and the receiver for a lifetime. That’s a purse that won’t wear out!

Jesus also said another interesting thing in this story. It’s probably one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. What he said was that where your treasure is, there your heart will be. I say this is often misquoted because I’ve heard preachers say stuff like you can tell where your heart is by what you spend your money on. They tell us that if we want to know where our true passion lays all we have to do is look carefully at our bank statements. While that might be true it has absolutely nothing to do with what Jesus was talking about. What Jesus was interested in and what we should all be interested in is how can we change our heart. I can tell you right now, I already know my heart isn’t always on God and Jesus. Sometimes I love my stuff more. Sometimes I love my family more than God. Sometimes I love my job more than God… I already know the state of my heart, how about you? Can you truthfully say you love God with your whole heart and strength and mind? So, yes it’s true that you can tell where your heart is by studying where you spend your time, treasure and talents, but how is that ever going to help you get out of that sinful situation? What we need is a way out. What we need is a way to change our heart’s motivations and that’s the question Jesus is addressing when He says where your treasure is there your heart will be. You can love Jesus more. You can love God more. What you have to do is invest your time, your treasure, and your talent, because when you do your heart will follow.

This isn’t rocket science. It works like this. I spent 4 years of my life studying at Kent State University. I spent a lot of money on tuition, book, lab fees and everything else a college student needs. In other words I invested a lot of time, treasure, and talent at KSU. To this day, 38 years after I graduated from that institution, I still love that place. I still root for the Golden Flashes, even over the beloved Buckeyes… My heart is still in love with Kent State. I still remember the black squirrels that would eat popcorn out of your hand. I still remember riding my bike from class to class. And I still remember that’s where I met the second love of my life who comes right after Jesus, sorry honey… My point is you can change your heart. We all can love Jesus more by simply investing in the things Jesus loves. We all know He loved the poor. He loved the sick. He loved the hungry. He loved those who were like sheep without a shepherd and He loved the Church.

You should know this. The reason we want to do all this in the first place is out of a thankful heart for what God has already done. Remember, Jesus said it was His Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom and all rights and benefits thereof. Your eternal salvation is already secure and nothing can ever change that fact. You are that loved by God. So, everything else flows from the joy of knowing we are already life members of His little flock.

May we find even more ways to invest our time, treasure, and talent in those things we know God loves and in so doing may our hearts follow and love God even more. May we continue to make purses that never wear out. May God’s love be the example we imitate as we become even better givers to God’s glory. Amen.