

**The first two scripture readings are from the Book of Proverbs:**

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.

<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.

**Proverbs 17:3**

<sup>3</sup> The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,  
but the LORD tests the heart.

**The second reading is from the Gospel of Matthew:**

**Matthew 6:24-33**

<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

**The Message is entitled, "What's Your Priority?"**

Have you seen the commercials for Capital One? Let me give you a hint...the tag line is, "What's in your wallet?" The commercial suggests that if you had your priorities straight, you would only have a Capital One credit card in your wallet. Why? Well, all other credit cards are poor imitations of the benefits offered by Capital One. At least, that is their story. I'm not sure many of us are convinced to change credit cards when we experience their commercials. Yet, Capital One continues to make for entertaining commercials when you have to watch them!

Now our text this morning is part of Jesus' rather extensive sermon known as the Sermon on the Mount. In response to the overwhelming crowds that followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan, Jesus went up a knoll, and after he sat down, his disciples gathered around him. Now I am sure the crowds didn't dissipate, but Jesus was focused on his disciples as he began teaching.

Jesus didn't begin his teaching with, "What's in your wallet," but he did address, "What's in your heart." Jesus wanted to know the condition of the disciples' hearts. He wanted to know if they were going to trust the Lord with all their heart.

The way of life Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount is radically countercultural

then and now: Blessed are the poor, not those swimming in wealth. Blessed are those who mourn, not those who are happy because they have everything they need. Blessed are those who are persecuted, not those who use their power at all costs to maintain their power.

Jesus also said to his disciples be like salt and light, not tasteless invisible members of your society. And by the way turn the other cheek and love your enemies! I can hear the disciples internally wonder, "Really?" Why would you want us to love our Roman oppressors?

Jesus wasn't finished though because next he critiqued normalized Jewish religious practices by saying, "Do not give or pray or fast so that others will notice your piety." Those who visibly display their piety have received their reward! And then Jesus says something that totally contradicts the need to have more than anyone else, "Do not store up treasures on earth." It is not the one with the most toys that wins!

Now Jesus is only two thirds of the way through his powerful sermon when we encounter the text we read today. The sermon to this point, if enacted, is enough to totally alter one's trajectory in life. But at this juncture in his sermon, I sense that Jesus may have paused for a summary statement before his grand, "Therefore". I imagine a pregnant pause before he locks eyes with his disciples directly and says, "You can't serve two masters. You can't serve God and wealth. You cannot serve two masters that demand 100% allegiance."

Jesus is asking his newly minted disciples to deeply consider their priorities. Not what's in your wallet, but what's in your heart? What is it going to be...are the ways of God outlined so eloquently in his sermon going to take precedence in their lives? Are they going to stop buying into their culture's definition of success, comfort or security? Are the ways of God going to be their number one priority in their lives no matter what the personal cost?

What's your priority? Whose ways do you follow? Does God have your whole heart? Well, Christians throughout the ages, have struggled with the way of life outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. I mean who wants to feel blessed by being persecuted? Who wants to do the difficult work of loving their enemies? Who wants to do everything in secret, so that no recognition is forthcoming? Who wants to give up control, comfort and security?

Yet, Jesus is pretty clear, for he says that we can't serve two masters. The rub is this though, whether we consciously choose or not, our lives will bear witness to who or what is the master of our lives. The context of our passage suggests that if we don't choose God as our priority, then worry is going to reign in our lives.

Worry about whether or not we will have enough money for the length of our days; worry about our health and whether or not an illness is lying hidden in the frames of our body; worry as to whether or not we will have family or friends that will care for us when we can no longer care for ourselves; worry about the neighborhoods in which we live and whether or not they are safe; worry about this particular church and who will step up as leaders; worry about whether or not this church has a long-term future; worry about whether we might be a victim of the violence so prevalent in our society; worry about whether or not our children, grandchildren or even our great children will make the right life choices; worry about whether or not others will like and accept us; worry about... you fill in the blank, as I am sure you have a few of your own that I haven't mentioned.

Jesus' grand THEREFORE is not a suggestion though, it is a command. Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life!" Jesus is calling us to attention, "News flash - You aren't really in control of your life, even though you think you are." "For goodness sake, you can't add even a single hour

to the span of your life," says Jesus. God alone governs the cosmos. God alone is sovereign. So, get your priorities straight, set your heart on God and don't place priority on wealth or any other commodity or person the world has to offer, for what the world has to offer is fleeting, it is like grass that withers and dies.

Do not worry. Do not worry about your life. Easier said than done. Expectant parents worry about the world their children will inherit. Professionals worry about their careers and their promotability. Seniors worry about their finances and whether there will be enough. Yet, worry can cripple and even paralyze us, making it impossible for us to enjoy the splendor of the moment, ***for worry creates a future that consumes the present.*** Jesus puts it a little stronger I believe, for he says that ***worry means we have our priorities all wrong! Worry means we have put our trust in something else besides God.***

"What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Is it the size of your bank accounts? Is it your family? Is it your home? Is it your friends? This question is the first question of what is known as *The Heidelberg Catechism* and in 1559, two reformed theologians, Zacharias Ursinus and Kaspar Olevianus, co-wrote the answer to this question and it begins like this, "That I belong – body and soul, in life and in death - not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ..." Over 500 years later this phrase along with Romans 8:39 inspired the closing statement of a Brief Statement of Faith, "With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing *in life or in death*, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing can separate us...not even worry, for we belong to God.

Yet, how do we live into this answer, that we belong body and soul, in life and in death, not to ourselves but to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ? How do we live into this answer when our culture screams, "It is all about you?" It is all about me. It is all about what I can accumulate, what I can spend, what I can influence, what I can have my way. Our culture drills into us from our earliest years that the individual is supreme. Me, myself and I rule!

A Franciscan friar ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church in 1970 has some words of wisdom for us about how to live into this answer. Richard Rohr simply, yet profoundly writes, "*It's [life is] not about us, and it's always about God.*"

It's not about us... It's not about me... It's not about you... Let that sink in for a moment, as you reflect on your life and our life together as a church. This whole adventure we call living is not about us, it always about God.

Imagine... imagine just how different our lives would be if we reprioritized our lives according to the Heidelberg Catechism and the wisdom of Richard Rohr, "My life will be all about God – what God wants, what God desires, what God hopes for the world."

God envisions a peaceable kingdom where war will be no more. God envisions a new creation, where death will be no more; where mourning and crying and pain will be no more. God envisions a world where every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. God envisions God's home among us.

Yet, Rohr states how difficult it is to live into this "It's all about God" reality, for he writes, "I believe that this is one of the toughest spiritual lessons to learn." "It's not about us and it's always about God." Surrendering our will is one of the toughest spiritual lessons there is to learn. Our proverb speaks to this, "Do not rely on your own insight, rather trust in the Lord with all your heart."

Rohr talks about how difficult this is: “We are so hell bent on us, on meeting our needs, our wants and our ways. Disagreements, arguments, breakups, write offs and even wars are started over “It’s all about us.”

Is it possible for us to even conceive that it is not all about us, as individuals or as a church? Jesus is suggesting that if we are able to make life always about God and not about us then things would be radically different. First and foremost, worry would be no more, for it wouldn’t matter whether we live or die, what would matter is that we belong to the Lord.

Seven years ago, about 35 people gathered regularly for worship on Sunday in Cambridge United Presbyterian Church in a church building that could easily seat 450. Not one door in the church opened and shut properly, but instead of fixating on the problem, they used the metaphor of opening their doors to explore “It’s all about God.” The pastor even had a doorknob on her desk to inspire her preaching, which led to a new mission statement, “To love God and others in Jesus name,” and a new vision, “To be a center of hospitality and service in Washington County.” When it no longer was about the church, but about what God wants new life took root, with the help of seed money from their Presbytery. They welcomed new ministries to their campus, a food pantry and their town’s summer children’s program. Of course, open doors invite people in but they also send people out. Cambridge Presbyterian Church is being reshaped by mission as often as they offer themselves and their facilities in partnership to all of Cambridge.

Trinity Presbyterian Church was down to 25 members in a neighborhood caught in the crossfire of drug trafficking, gang violence and poverty. But Hazel Pflugmacher, in 1987 at the tender age of eighty, shifted the church’s focus to “It’s all about God.” They were located next to an elementary school that had the highest free and reduced lunch enrollment in Tacoma. Hazel recruited retired schoolteachers and other church members and they started a reading and mentoring program for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. As children came to Trinity, relationships began to develop with others in the community, which led to a weekly soup and conversation ministry. In the early 1990’s, with the help of University Place Presbyterian Church, they added a medical clinic for those without health insurance. “Trinity was an incredible group of older adults who thought they were young,” said Kevin Hunter the father of one of the first young families to join the church. He continued saying, “It was amazing how committed they were to God’s vision to stay in the neighborhood.”

We don’t have 25 or 35 members, we have close to 200 members. I wonder what our future story will be as we realize our life together is all about God?

Friends, it is really not about us. It is all about God. And if we want to stop worrying about our age, our numbers, our budget or keeping up with maintenance costs, then maybe we need to check the condition of our hearts. Is our priority God’s vision? Do we trust in the LORD with all our hearts, and realize that we cannot just rely on our own insights?” As Lynn Miller suggests, “Stewardship is the act of organizing your life so that God can spend you.” **How might God spend us, if being the church is really not about us, but all about God?** Amen.