

“Making Room to Give”

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¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴“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.

²⁵“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? ²⁶Look 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? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But 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?

³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
(Matthew 6:19-33)

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” For a long time, when I would hear that teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, I would think of my checkbook. That dates me, I know. Checkbooks are as much of an anachronism as cassette tapes and pay phones at this point. But a lot of you remember the days when we would keep track of our monthly expenses in the ledger of our checking account. That running chronological list of the checks we wrote not only showed all the places where we spent our money, but also how often we spent money in those places, and how much of our money we gave to them. We could learn a lot about ourselves on those ledgers.

So, when Jesus says “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” I figured he meant that my checkbook had a lot to say about the location of my heart. The checkbook showed -- in stark, numerical terms -- where my treasure was going every month, which also meant that my heart must be spending a lot of time at the bank that held my mortgage... the utility company that heated my house... the dealership that financed my car... the Harris Teeter where I bought my groceries. Those must be the regular haunts of my heart, because if my money follows my heart, then I just have to follow the money trail and it will reveal to me what my heart truly loves.

In other words, my checkbook must be like Jack Sparrow’s mysterious compass in “Pirates of the Caribbean.” Most of you have probably seen it, but in case you haven’t, in those movies, Johnny Depp’s character had a compass, which is not in itself unusual, except that this particular compass did not point to magnetic north. Instead, it would point to the



greatest longing of that person's heart. If you held that compass, to quote Jack Sparrow, it would point you "to the thing you want most in this world."¹

But today, I think I was wrong. At least, I think I was wrong about what Jesus was really saying. Yes, I do think our spending can reveal a lot about what we are valuing, what we are seeking, what we in this moment think is most important. But a few years back I read a book called *Giving to God* by a biblical scholar named Mark Allen Powell, and Powell flips the script. Powell suggests that Jesus was not really talking about where our hearts are right now. Jesus was much more interested on where our hearts could be in the future. What if Jesus wasn't saying our money follows our hearts? What if Jesus was really saying that ***our hearts follow our money?***

Do you see how radically different this teaching is? The verb Jesus uses is a future tense verb. It is about what "will be" in the future. This makes sense, given that Jesus teaches this lesson right in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount, which was all about changing the future. It is all about breaking the shackles of worldly thoughts and actions and rising up to a higher plane of living in the future...

"You have always heard it said 'You shall not murder,'" Jesus teaches, "but I say to you that even if you are angry with a brother or sister you need to be careful, and you need to seek reconciliation."

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say to you 'Even lustful thoughts are dangerous.'"

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say that 'If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.'"

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"

The entire Sermon on the Mount is about moving beyond what is and reaching higher to what can be, what should be. So, when it comes to our money and our hearts, Jesus the Great Physician doesn't want to simply diagnose the situation that exists right now. Jesus is much more interested in showing us a better way, a more righteous way. He wants to make our hearts warmer, happier, and stronger.

And we all want that, right? We all want our hearts to be healthy, not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally. The problem is that such a goal can feel unrealistic. We can envision a happier, healthier heart, but how do we get there? How can we change our heart? Because, as Woody Allen famously said about Soon-Yi, "The heart wants what the heart wants."

Or, for a less gross example, there is a great old Bonnie Raitt song called "I Can't Make You Love Me." The song gives voice to a woman in a relationship that is falling apart. She loves her partner, but she has come to the tragic realization that, no matter how hard she tries, she cannot control the heart of the other person. "*I can't make you love me if you don't,*" she sings. "*You can't make your heart feel somethin' it won't.*"²

But then here comes Jesus saying, "Don't be so sure." You can -- you can change a heart. If there is something you want your heart to feel, if there is a place you want your heart to go, there is a way to guide it. And it can start with how you spend your money.

¹ "Jack Sparrow's compass," https://pirates.fandom.com/wiki/Jack_Sparrow%27s_compass

² Powell, Mark Allen. *Giving to God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing (2006), p 49; lyrics printed from <http://www.cowboylitics.com/lyrics/raitt-bonnie/i-cant-make-you-love-me-1694.html>, on October 11, 2011.

We've all heard the expression, "Put your money where your mouth is." What Jesus seems to be saying is similar, but with a twist: "Put your money where your heart *wants to be*," because where your treasure is, there your heart will go also.

In a way, this is what the Mission Realization Task Force is currently doing here at LAC. Back in 2019 and 2020, during the pastoral transition, the congregation of LAC conducted a thorough study of its mission and ministry. In that process, you talked about some places that you wanted to go together. There were things you wanted to make more important – things that sprang from your hopes and your hearts. You said you wanted to deepen your **connections** with one another – to create space for sharing and vulnerability, a place where people could feel safe. You said you wanted to maintain a depth and inviting spirit in our **worship**. You wanted to increase our investment of time and energy in **service**, and to foster programs for **youth** that welcomed the next generation more fully into church life. Earlier this year, the session asked a group in our congregation to do some dreaming about ways we can go to these places, and for the past six months a group of six members has been visualizing progress in each of these four areas. They are imagining what we might do to walk toward these places where our congregational heart wants to be, and they will soon be making specific recommendations to our elected church leaders about how we can get there together.

And how is it that we get there together? We keep in mind where we want to go. We think of steps we can take to get closer to those places. And then we invest energy in those things. We invest time in those things. We invest our abilities and talents in those things. And yes, we spend our money on those things. Because where our treasure is, there are our hearts will be also.

But let me be clear – this is not just about money. I don't know if you all have looked into the streaming service "MasterClass," but there are some great resources there for people who have goals but are looking for help in how to achieve those goals. If you want to cook like a professional chef, there are multiple Master Classes for that. If you have always wanted to write a novel, successful novelists share their strategies and wisdom with you. One of the classes I have watched is by Steve Martin, because I happen to love Steve Martin, but I've gotten some great tips on storytelling and writing from him. And I remember distinctly one tip he gave to people who aspire to be comedians or comedy writers. He says that, if you really want to be in that world, if you really want to be a comedy writer, you have to move to the places where prominent comedy is happening. "You've gotta be there," he says. "You've gotta be in that place where it's done. I say go where the action is.... You've got to be in the middle of it... You've got to put yourself in the position to be chosen."

That is wonderful advice for the hopes we have here at LAC. You have said you want to go to these places, where connection, worship, service, and work with youth are more a part of who we are. And if that is what we want, we have to be there. We have to be in that place where it's done. We can't just talk about it, and we can't expect someone else to do it for us. We have to be where the action is. We have to be in the middle of that work. We have to put ourselves in the position to be chosen for these blessings. And the good news from God is that where our investments of time, talent and treasure go, our hearts will follow.

If we have a goal, we have to make room for that goal. We have to make room so that we can give, and invest the best of ourselves, as if we really want to achieve that goal and

make it happen. If we can do that... if we will do that... then we make room for our hearts to move, to grow, and to make their way to the places that we really want to go. ***Amen.***