

Investments of the Soul
Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21
March 6, 2019 – Ash Wednesday

Friends, it's Ash Wednesday. Welcome to Lent. Lent is a very special time of year; In a scriptural sense, as we have been working our way through the Gospel of Luke, Lent is the point where Jesus turns his sights to Jerusalem and the cross, and of course, the resurrection. But in a personal and spiritual sense, Lent is a time when we are invited to further our relationship with the living Christ. Each of us is daily invited into that relationship, but at Lent. . . At Lent we are invited to truly step that up a notch, as we daily seek a closer, fuller relationship with the divine. That's why we give you these Lenten Devotional Booklets, that you might get into the habit of daily devotionals; and, of course, when Lent is over, there will be other devotionals available to continue your special time with the holy. During Lent, I suggest that you pray before meals, every meal. But perhaps most importantly, I suggest that you maintain a constant awareness that Christ is with you, always with you, walking beside you to lead you, to guide you, to protect you, and to love you.

And so today, on Ash Wednesday, we come to this traditional Ash Wednesday scripture. "Do not invest your treasures on earth where moths and rust can consume and thieves can break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot consume, and thieves do not break in and steal. For where you treasure is, there your heart will be also."

I have often preached about problems of materialism. It was just two weeks ago, when we considered Luke's "Blessings and Woes" that I spoke about the dangers of finding our joy in earthly things instead of in the hope and faith in Jesus Christ. But this scripture really sums it all up – Invest in the things of heaven.

Now, I need to tell you, this is not a stewardship sermon. While, yes, I believe we are called to use the material resources that God has given us to benefit those less fortunate than ourselves; and, yes, I believe we are called as Christians to support the church, the body of Christ; that is not what this scripture is about. I believe this scripture is about what I sometimes call "emotional coin." This scripture is about how we will invest our time, our thoughts, our very being, our soul. It's not just about money, it's about all that is important to us.

In a few weeks, we'll hear the story of a woman who anointed Jesus with some costly oil. Witnesses criticized her. They commented that the oil could have been sold, and the money given to the poor. But the passage emphasizes: It's not about money; it's about investing in the love of Christ.

Friends, the greatest treasure any of us has is our very soul. I was recently asked, "What's a soul?" Of course, it's not easily defined. I remember reading in my Intro to Psychology textbook as a college freshman that, "What a theologian calls the soul, a psychologist calls the personality." Well, "yes" and "no." I like to define the soul as "our very being" – whatever that means. To equate "soul" with

“personality” is both overly simplistic and it discounts certain personality disorders that simply are not truly a part of who we are as children of God. Yes, soul is who we are. Soul is our inner being. Soul is the love we share. Soul is that essence of God that the author of Genesis is speaking of when he states that all of us, male and female, are created “in the image of God.” Soul is that spark of the divine that lives in each of us. Soul is the source of our love; and I’ll say more about that in a couple weeks.

And so, as we enter Lent, I ask, “Where will you invest your soul?” How will you seek to live a closer, fuller, richer relationship with the living Christ. Some of you know my favorite benediction:

May the living Christ go with you.
May he go behind you to encourage you;
beside you to befriend you;
about you to watch over you;
within you to give you strength;
and before you to show you the way.

That’s my prayer for you this Lent.

How often have I said that the most important verse in the entire New Testament is the last verse of Matthew’s Gospel: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” As we enter Lent, may we seek to live every moment of every day in the constant knowledge of the loving presence of Christ with us.

Yes, this is Ash Wednesday. In a few moments, you will be invited forward. If you so choose, I will place some ashes on your forehead in the sign of the cross; and you will hear the words: “From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return. Repent and believe the Gospel.” Yes, that sounds very dark; but, I hope, this Ash Wednesday, that you will hear in that the invitation to invest not in the things of this world. Rather, invest your soul in the things of heaven. Invest your soul in the love of Christ; and seek, out of that love, an ever closer relationship with the Christ who is always with us.

And finally, it is hugely appropriate that you proceed directly from the imposition of ashes directly to the sacrament of Holy Communion. For here we have the whole story. Yes, the imposition of ashes tells us to reject worldly things, that which is temporary; and the sacrament of Communion invites us, once again, to experience the love of Christ which is eternal.

Do not invest your soul in worldly things. Rather invest it in the things of heaven, in the love of Christ experienced and shared. May it be so this Lent, and even for ever more.

Amen.