

***Taking Care of Our Stuff* – Luke 12:32-34**

Rev. Matt Nieman

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I've spoken before from the pulpit about a vehicle I've had that has endured through different seasons of my life. It's the beautiful and durable '05 Honda Odyssey minivan.

It was purchased six months after Jacob was born in July of 2004. The first week I owned it, I backed into a light pole parking it at a College World Series game in Omaha. It went on numerous road trips, with two of the seats occupying child car seats for several of those years. It's hauled furniture, luggage, lawn mowers, and toys. After we moved here, I spilled a huge pot of chili in it on the drive down to take a meal to UKirk students one August evening.

Since he got his license two years ago, Jacob has driven the van many miles himself, including to Ohio and back with his friends back in June for their "senior trip."

And this Saturday, he will drive it to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where it will sit in a student parking lot most of the time for at least this upcoming school year.

Oh, the tales that van could tell.

It's funny: since we made that last payment on that van several years ago, I've looked at that vehicle differently. Since it was fully paid for, it's been one of the most beautiful cars I've seen.

Now, hearing me gush over and get all giddy over a car seems sort of materialistic, you say. And that doesn't square with what a preacher should be saying about material things, you say. He should be more concerned with spiritual things.

Well, I join the Rev. Michael Lindvall, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, when he wrote [in *The Christian Century*] that "materialism is not exactly the problem [today], and that being more spiritual isn't exactly the answer."

If we read the Bible with any kind of honesty and integrity, it should become clear, after all, that God doesn't hate stuff. All we

have to do is examine the creation story and realize that God did not distance himself from material things. Rather, God created material things.

In the first creation narrative, God takes six days to create everything in the world—the sky, water, dry ground, vegetation, living creatures, and so on. It is God who made all this stuff. And then, in a true reflection of just how much God loves all this stuff that God has made, God congratulates himself at the conclusion of his work. Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw all that God had made and it was very good.”

“Good job,” God says to himself. “This is good stuff.”

We also see how much God liked material stuff when he himself became material. God became flesh in Jesus Christ—something physically tangible. God was now not just something spiritual but something to be touched and seen and smelled in the person of Jesus.

Just in the story of the nativity, we learn that God is not about separating the spiritual from the material: it’s about precisely the opposite. “The Nativity story is strategically loaded with loving material detail at every plot turn: a baby born too soon to an unwed mother, the sounds and colors and smells of labor and delivery, the ripe odor of straw and animals and dung and unwashed shepherds fresh from the hills, the frank materiality of the rich gifts of the Magi.”

When we read the Bible, we can’t ignore the reality that God wasn’t against material things. He was about incorporating both the spiritual and the material together.

When both the material and the spiritual are joined together, we’re faced with the concept of stewardship—the taking care of what God has made. In order to be good stewards, we must have something or some things to be good stewards of. One can’t be a good steward without having stuff.

In fact, I agree with Michael Lindvall again when he says, “The problem is not so much that we like stuff too much; rather it’s that we

don't like it enough." We acquire stuff but then quickly tire of the stuff we have to the point where we feel compelled to replace new things with things that are perfectly good in the first place. We replace and replace instead of reusing what we have to the point where our acquiring of more stuff is a reflection of how we are trying to fill the spiritual void in our lives with things that will never fully quench our thirst.

Jesus gets to this point in our gospel lesson for today, when he says in verse 33, "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out." He didn't encourage people to make enough purses for each day or outfit or season or job—ones that could be thrown away on a whim. No, he in effect tells his disciples to be good stewards of what they have by taking the time to make purses that can be used again and again.

The number of purses one had, Jesus seemed to have said, weren't the keys to lasting peace. You had to have them, but they can't prove our worth.

Being a good steward means taking the time to assess whether we really need more and more and more, or whether we can acknowledge that the stuff we already have is good enough.

This concept of reusing as part of our stewardship can be an important part of our role in preserving God's creation. It joins other good stewardship components that we're all familiar with: turning down the thermostats in the winter and turning them up in the summer, recycling all kinds of things (including our bulletins on Sunday mornings!)

Being good stewards of the environment, though, really comes down to this same concept: not needing the convenience of something new or more comfortable all the time to find a place of peace and contentment in the world we live in. It's not the material things that are the problem; it's how we treat them which reflect our priorities.

And speaking of things that can and always should be reused, our stewardship is about more than the physical stuff we have. It's

also about the stuff we have inside each of us: the gifts and skills that God has given us. It takes quite a while for our talents to get so rusty that they can't be used any more for the kingdom of God. Often times they simply lay dormant, waiting for the right opportunity to be put to use again.

The church needs your gifts—not just 20 years ago, or five years ago, or even last year. It needs them today. We are good stewards when we use those gifts right up until their expiration date. And they need to be reused again and again.

This morning, we're so glad to have the gifts of our children leading us in music. Their energy, their voices, their love for being here inspires us to use our gifts for their benefit and the benefit of others. And to take care of them—to be good stewards of the gifts they are to us.

And underlying all this talk of taking care of our stuff is the inherent obligation to take care of the other things that are even more important to us—our relationships, our health, our communities and our faith.

Just like Jesus calls us to make purses for ourselves that do not wear out, let us take care to make sure our relationships, our minds and bodies, our neighborhoods and our relationships with God do not wear out either.

Sometimes we become fearful of being good stewards. That we won't have enough of what it takes to take care of and preserve the gifts given to us. In the end, though, God gives us the strength to protect and extend the life of what is important.

Even a seventeen-year-old minivan.