

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Midweek Advent 2  
December 13, 2023  
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl  
***Let go of Christmas and hold on to true treasures!***

How many of you like to receive gifts? How many of you like to give gifts? My family gave me an incredible gift on Father's Day. It was so thoughtful. It fit me just perfectly. They gave me an annual subscription to the unlimited sip club at Panera Bread. I know. Isn't that the perfect gift? I can go into any Panera Bread and get a cup of coffee or Bubby Sparkling Water every two hours if I wanted. For free! It's awesome. It's the gift that keeps on giving. Well, at least until the annual subscription runs out. Then it stops. As wonderful as that gift is, it doesn't last forever.

Isn't that how things are in this world? Even the greatest gifts that we can give each other will run out or get destroyed. Think about all the gifts that you will have under the Christmas tree or in the stockings this year. How many of those gifts will last forever? Not a one. Nothing in this world lasts forever.

The cute little puppy doesn't stay a puppy for very long. It may give you great *joy* for a while, but eventually it will ... well, it will go the way of all flesh. The video game console may give you a lot of enjoyment for a while, but eventually the motherboard will conk out and become obsolete. The massage chair may give you some *peace* after a hard day's work for a while, but the stresses of life will still be waiting for you when you pull yourself out of that temporary relief. Nothing in this world lasts forever.

So, even though it is a very nice gesture to give gifts this Christmas, I would encourage you to... let go. Let go of those gifts that do not last, and instead hold on to true treasures.

The true treasures are not found in gifts placed under a tree or in a stocking. The true treasures are found in a little baby wrapped in flesh, placed in a manger, with a tag that says, "To the world, with love from your heavenly Father." Let go...and hold on to true treasures from Jesus. You see, what's in Jesus is peace with God, freedom from sin, comfort in our troubles, and life that never ends.

Just ponder those treasures. Peace with God. Maybe you feel strife right now with someone in your life. Someone isn't talking to you. You just don't see eye-to-eye on things. It hurts. By every right, God should do that to you and me. What do we have to offer God that he should want to be with us? Nothing. Our sins have separated us from God that we have nothing to offer him.

And that is exactly why God gives us Jesus. He removes the dividing wall of hostility between us and God. Instead of drawing the line in the sand as God's enemies, he makes us his friends, no, even more, he makes us his family. The prophets often use pictures of animals that would naturally hate each other, lying down and snuggling up to one another. A lion snuggles with a lamb. It's a picture of peace. That's what we now have with God because the little baby in Bethlehem has removed the dividing wall of hostility and has covered us with his precious blood. You have peace with God.

You have freedom from sin. Your sinful nature is no longer your master. The devil, who wants to hold you in his hellish grip, no longer has his boney fingers clutching your neck. You are free. The little baby in Bethlehem has come to crush Satan's head and set you free. You actually have the power to say "No" to any temptation that comes before you. You have freedom from your sins.

You have comfort in all your troubles. We live as foreigners in this world. We face trouble all day long. But the promises of God lift our eyes from this world to treasures that last forever. You have treasures in heaven. The little baby in Bethlehem is the almighty King who has secured a home for you in heaven. No one can take it away from you. It is yours now, and it will always be yours. It's a mansion where you will live without pain, without fear, without crying, without dying.

These are true treasures. So, during this Advent season, we hear the call from Jesus to hold on to these true treasures. Loosen your grip on the things of this world. And instead increase your grip on true treasures: treasures that the Christ gives to you.

You know the hymn "Take the world, but give me Jesus." Sadly, for so many people, you don't even have to give them the entire world. So many people will just simply take a few things in this world rather than to have Jesus and the treasures he gives. It can be easy to lose sight of the true treasures and hold on to the glitter and tinsel of this world. Let go... and hold on to true treasures. Listen to how Jesus talks about this in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 12:

**"Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not become old, a treasure in the heavens that will not fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed, ready for service, and keep your lamps burning. Be like people waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the**

**door for him. Blessed are those servants, whom the master will find watching when he comes. Amen I tell you: He will dress himself and have them recline at the table, and he will come and serve them. Even if he comes in the second or third watch, they will be blessed if he finds them alert. But know this: If the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. You also be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you are not expecting him.” (Luke 2:32-40)**

The superintendent of a large Christian school was concerned about the disarray he found in so many of the classrooms he visited. Papers were often strewn on the floor, and the students' desks were surrounded by clutter. Feeling strongly that learning could not take place in such an untidy environment, he decided to take action.

He chose one classroom for an experiment. He introduced himself to the students and with a smile made this proposition: "Your teacher, principal and I provide a well-equipped classroom for you to enjoy, but we need your help in keeping your desks and the classroom orderly. Many of you have crumpled papers inside your desks with books left open and the pages bent. Often there are pencils on the floor under your desks along with other debris.

"I would like each of you to clean out your desk today and begin this school year resolving to keep it clean. One day I will return and inspect your desks, and the person with the neatest desk will be given this \$100 bill. I won't tell you which day it will be. It will be a surprise. Not even your teacher or the principal will know the day."

The children squealed with excitement and began immediately pulling things from their desks, filling the trash baskets with crumpled papers, stacking their books neatly inside their desks, and neatly lining up their pencils and pens.

Every morning for the first week, every student checked his or her desk to make sure it was in perfect condition, confident that today would be the day the superintendent returned. The next week, a few boys grew weary of the exercise and returned to their former habits. By the third week, several students remarked, "I doubt if he'll come back at all. He just said that to make us keep our desks clean." After two months, no one in the classrooms bothered to inspect their desks and in fact, forgot the superintendent's promise.

Except for one girl. Dutifully, she inspected her desk every morning and several times a day, making sure things were in proper order. For months, she was teased by the other students. "He's not coming back! Why do you keep looking for him? It's just dumb to believe that promise, anyway." Still, she remained quiet, kept her desk in perfect condition and waited.

Near the end of the school year, there was a knock on the door and the superintendent entered. Quickly, the students flung open their desks and began frantically to clean them. But the superintendent held up his hand for them to stop. All the students were asked to stand beside their desk at attention while the superintendent inspected each desk.

One after another, he rejected them for being unkempt. One boy tried giving excuses but to no avail. Another blamed the teacher for not reminding them. Still another blamed the superintendent for making them wait so long.

Finally, the superintendent arrived at the desk of the little girl who confidently displayed her well-kept desk while beaming at the superintendent. After inspecting her desk, he took her by the hand to the front of the classroom and awarded her the \$100 bill.

"Boys and girls," he said kindly, "this girl never stopped believing I would return so she kept her desk in perfect order. She didn't need to worry about what day or even what time of day I would arrive because she was always kept watch. She was always ready. And now she has received the treasure I promised."

My friends, that's what Jesus encourages us to do today. Always keep watch. Always be ready. He is coming back with treasures that are out of this world. Jesus encourages us to keep watch and be ready.

When Jesus first came into this world 2000 plus years ago, people weren't ready. No one knew that Christ was coming, except a very small group of people. The rest of the world was preoccupied with other things. The Roman governor of the land had ordered that a census should be taken of that area for tax purposes. Back then, if there was a census, you were compelled, by law, to go back to your ancestors' hometown and register there. That's what everyone was doing during that first Christmas. People were traveling, making arrangements about places to stay, where to eat, where to register for the census. Parties were taking place. Activities were going on. People were visiting family and friends they hadn't seen in a while.

It was a very busy, very crazy time in world history. The last thing on most people's minds was whether or not the Messiah would be born. After all, God had been promising to send a Messiah for thousands of years. You hear about that all the time. Most people had other things on their mind. They were focused on other things.

And then Christ was born, and everyone missed it. Oh, there were Mary and Joseph. There were a few shepherds out in the fields who were told by the angels what was going on. Hundreds of miles away there were the wise men, who noticed the star in the east. If you study your Bible, you find out that the wise men didn't make it to the manger on Christmas Eve – they were late, and came some time later. Besides them, everyone else missed it. After the census

was over, everyone went back home, completely unaware that something big – the biggest things that could possibly happen – took place. They were busy with the things of the season, and they missed the true treasure.

Well, this is also how it will be the second time Jesus comes to this earth, when he comes on Judgment Day. Most people won't be ready for it. After all, people have been talking about the world coming to an end for a long, long time. Right now, most people have other things that they are thinking about. They are so focused on the things of this world. But Jesus encourages us today to let go of the things of this world and hold on to true treasures.

Little kids always look forward to Christmas with eagerness and excitement for the gifts under the tree. Maybe adults do too. My encouragement to you today is to look forward with greater eagerness and excitement for the time when Jesus returns on the Last Day. He isn't going to bless you with \$100. It will be far greater. It will be an eternity of with him. Keep watch for that. For Jesus is coming with true treasures that last. Amen.