

**“Priceless”  
Matthew 6:19-34**

It may just be the most prominent “feeling” around this time of the year... but it may not be what you expect. Yes, there is much “joy” during this season. Just look at the kid whose face is pressed up against the window at Toys R Us or the guy eyeing the latest iPhone™ at the Mall or the gal looking at that big beautiful diamond in the local jewelry store display. But there is an even more prominent emotion at this time. Allow me to explain. The feeling happens when we go from store to store to store to store and still haven’t found the “perfect” gift for that someone “special”. It occurs when we walk the mine field of family time of how much time we spend with our side of the family and how much with the other side and who hosts Christmas and who is hosting New Years. And how will the weather be to travel and will we arrive on time and who is going to come down with the flu this year. But maybe the feeling is most prominent just after Christmas, like around the middle of January or whenever your credit card statement is due and you begin to add up the numbers of what you “really spent” or what your spouse “actually paid” for your gift on the Visa™, Mastercard™ or American Express™. How did you spend so much? Why did you spend so much? And then the **worry** sets it.

We all know of worry, (some of us more than others) the original recipients of Matthew’s gospel apparently knew about worry too for Matthew to write what he did. Yes, these words are Jesus’ words but I believe Jesus spoke more than just the words written in our Bibles but yet Matthew believed these words to be worthy of penning. And although Jesus’ words in the latter part of chapter 6 are still part of what we call, “The Sermon on the Mount,” which may sound like one “long” message, we do not need to necessarily see it as so. For if this was an exact transcript of the sermon that day, it appears that Jesus was not as clear and coherent as we first thought because he seems to jump around from one topic to another, from one theme to another with no or little transition. But with all that being said, these are Jesus’ actual words whether delivered exactly in the order written, but for some reason Matthew put all these passages together: From “treasure in heaven” (6:19-21) to “sound eyes” (6:22-24) to “serving two masters” (6:24) to “worry” (6:25-34). What could all these themes possibly share? What is the common thread that binds them all together? Because if they follow one another they share something in common and it maybe has to do with the word “therefore” as in a “concluding statement” as in “if you do or don’t this,” *therefore* “this will be the result”. “Therefore, do not worry”. I know what you are thinking, “Easier said than done, my good friend Jesus who... didn’t have a mortgage, outstanding student loans, a shaky marriage, an ill parent, an over demanding boss, no sick days left and a maxed out credit

card". It's real easy for Jesus to say, "Don't worry." But Jesus doesn't simply say, "Don't worry" period. Did you catch that? Instead, Jesus says, "Don't worry about.... and he goes on. Worry is not always a bad thing. Sometimes worry is a protection mechanism that can save us from being part of a dangerous situation. That kind of worry is not necessarily a bad thing. Instead Jesus says and Matthew records, "Don't worry about your life... what you will eat, drink or wear." (6:25) Again, this may sound easy because most of us eat reasonably well and I see we are all dressed here this morning – thank goodness. But give these words to the starving child in Africa or the homeless guy shivering on a Toronto street around this time of the year and they will hear these words very differently. So we need to keep reading on to get a better sense of what Jesus is trying to tell us. To help clarify, Jesus mentions a group of people (of whom we happen to belong) as the example of what not to do or how not to live. Jesus mentions the "Gentiles" (non Jews) and how they were "striving" (6:26) for things. In other words I don't think this "worry stuff" was so much about worrying about the essentials of life but about the "kind" of essentials. The Gentiles wanted the best of foods, they desired not just something to cover their bodies, but we can assume the best of clothes. This kind of striving then causes worry. Instead Jesus instructs his followers to "strive" (first) for the Kingdom of God and God's righteousness," (6:33) Do this and you will not worry (as much). Yes, worry, I believe is, the most prominent emotion of this season but it need not be.

At this point (the end of our passage) we are then drawn back to where our passage began - this "alternate Kingdom" I say "alternate" because the Kingdom of God is very different than "this" present-day worldly kingdom of where you and I live and is based on those "things" that cause us to worry – those things that cost. You may or may now know this, but money and finances is the topic Jesus speaks most on - more than heaven and hell combined. And it's important to understand this because Jesus' idea about "treasure" is very different than what most of us think of when we think of "treasure." And Jesus attacks that incorrect image early in our passage this morning. The world's idea of treasure is anything that "moth or rust can destroy" or "where thieves can break in and steal." (6:19) Again it's not that "things" are not important or even unnecessary. The problem is the "storing up" (6:19) of these things. The original Greek word here means to "bring near" as in "bringing a ship to land" which doesn't sound too bad. But when we read on in this definition we see it means to "attend to" or "give heed" and a littler further, "to be addicted to." I suppose you could said it is that age old debate about "your wants" vs. "your needs" or maybe I should say, "how much you want it" or "how much you think you need it." I believe we all understand this kind of thinking. As I write this part of my sermon I am sitting in my family room at home as my office is a mess with the upcoming community Christmas concert. So as I type I look around to see those things that Allyson and I have "acquired" over the years. There is a beautiful

leather coach and chair (a kijiji find). There is an RCA flat screen tv and a Bose™ sound bar to my left. I can hear see the kitchen from where I type that we redid and then recently painted again just a short time ago. There is an electronic mixer and coffee machine on the counter with the latter providing me the extra boost I need to finish this paragraph. I am not ashamed to “own” any of these “things” because they are useful and practical and maybe you have even enjoyed them with us. If I were to “add up” or put an “amount” on what I see around me (as in “selling” all I have) I could acquire money and that’s only two rooms of our home. So I take these words to heart because I hope you know the words Allyson and I deliver every Sunday are not just for you but for us as well. So as I look around I wonder, “Have I stored up treasures?” Is that what Jesus is saying, is that what He is trying to convict me of this morning? So I look around the room again and I now notice “other” things that are certainly not as “valuable” as our couch, our chair, our tv, our kitchen or our coffee maker. I notice two pictures on our wall – beside our Christmas tree in circular frames. There are two black and white photographs that Lily took. One is a picture of Allyson and I hand in hand walking down a street and the other of the two of us face on, on a recent trip to Chicago last March. No one would buy them but to me they are invaluable but not the pictures necessary but Allyson and the photographer and the memory of our trip. And then I look just to the right to see our artificial tree. ARTIFICIAL tree! – I have become such a central Canadian. It’s not adorned with expensive trinkets but meaningful ornaments that speak of different times in our lives as children and our lives as a family. I guess what I am trying to say or share is that the things around our house (couch, chair, tv, kitchen, coffee maker) are not treasures to me. I guarantee you that our couch and chair will wear out, and our tv would be the first thing taken if a thief broke in and one day our coffee maker will rust out. But Allyson and Lily will last forever because they are eternal. Those “other” things are “nice,” don’t get me wrong, and they are “eye catching” but not if our eyes are healthy. (6:22-23) Those “things,” if allowed, will even become things I “serve” (6:24) and can, without me even knowing it, become god-like in my life. In other words, before the couch wears out we want another, before the tv stops working or becomes “out of date” I look for a newer model or buy a second or a third tv. And you now know the logical result of all this “storing up” is that we are back to where we began: We worry.

So if you are tired of worrying if you are overwhelmed with the constant storing up, if you are wanting to do things different, live differently, than I would invite you to conspire with us. There is still time, even to begin this year, even though Christmas is just a few weeks away now – because I know you have not done everything on your “do list” yet. If you would like to worry a little less, if you would like to live with God’s Kingdom in mind (maybe for the first time) I have really only one simple phrase for you: “Spend Less.” Spend less this Christmas. Simplify Christmas. Join the

Advent Conspiracy. If you are a couple you don't need to provide one another with multiple gifts, especially useless gifts that will not be used other than being put on a shelf and later given to Value Village™. This year remind one another that this is not about "cheaping out" nor is the amount we spend on one another the "amount" we love the other as in "spend a lot – love a lot," "spend a little – love a little". Be thoughtful in choosing a gift but it need not be a gift that you end up paying minimum payments on your credit card next year. If you are a parent do not spoil your kids with "everything" on their Christmas list AND you need not feel guilty about that. Teach your children that it is ok to wait. It will bode them well for the rest of their lives. And all those gifts for other people or relatives you barely know but still exchange every year (and you are not sure why) stop it and simply send a meaningful card or a hand made gift. Spend less this Christmas and you will worry less. I guarantee it.

The result, although not immediate, will be real and for some of us even life changing. Yes, I believe you will worry less if you spend less; worry less about finding the perfect gift and getting a great deal on it. Worry less that maybe you are not so different from the rest of the world who get caught up in the commercialism of the season. And you will most definitely worry less about the January credit card statement. Conspire as a couple, conspire as a family to recapture what this season is really all about. And it's NOT about spending and debt and worry but about God's Kingdom that came near in the humbleness of a manger and the simplicity of a child that did not cost anything in the world's eyes but to us, was truly "priceless." Is this not what Christmas is all about? Then let's conspire this year to make this Christmas different than all the others.

Let us pray.