

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“The Temporal Stuff of Life Versus the Eternal Promises of God”

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“Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?” (2 Peter 3:11).

Years ago, I had a member in St. Louis who was a compulsive hoarder. Walking into her home was a full sensory experience. There was a mishmash of floor to ceiling stuff with a narrow trail winding its way around the house . . . virtually no place to sit or prepare a meal or eat a meal. It was even problematic to find a place to set my little traveling communion case. The whole house was dark because the light had no place to go; it was trapped by all the nooks and corners. The house smelled of dank cardboard. Most of the stuff in the house appeared to have little or no value; but it was precious to her. She wasn't just faking it; she had a strong emotional attachment to all of it. She also believed she would need these things.

A part of me thought there's an easy fix here. Park a couple of big dumpsters out front, organize a crew from church and empty the place. But it doesn't work that way. There are no easy fixes with hoarding. It doesn't help yelling at or shaming the hoarder. Even with the best of psychological intervention and care, hoarding tends to be a chronic, lifelong struggle.

You can imagine then how it goes when family tries to intervene. There's usually a clash of wills leading to anger, hurt, even estrangement. Hoarding can tear a family apart. It's hard for a family member not to think, “She has chosen all that stuff over me.”

I wonder if God ever thinks that way about us and the stuff we own or want. “They have chosen all that stuff over me. They think it's so valuable, so important. They are emotionally attached to it. They feel they need it all. But me? Me they have let go.”

It's all the more poignant because our texts this morning remind us, we are short lived, mortal beings, and everything we possess is also temporal and doomed for destruction.

The Old Testament lesson does not tread lightly on our sensitivities. “All flesh is grass [just grass] and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the LORD stands forever” (Is. 40:6).

The Epistle reminds us not just our bodies, but this earth and everything you and I own, will one day be destroyed. Verse 10, “The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed . . . all these things will be dissolved.” Dissolved, meaning so broken down that it disappears altogether. This includes every trinket and tool, the car, the house, the artwork: all gone. Dissolved. Very few things endure the ravages of time. Nothing will endure the day of the Lord.

With all this in mind, doesn't it seem wise to reconsider the value we place on things; the value of the stuff we purchased on Black Friday or ordered on Cyber Monday, stuff we are waiting for with such anticipation. Would that we waited for the return of the Lord with the

same anticipation. But we think our stuff is more important . . . we worked for it, saved for it. Or it's been passed down to us and we hope to pass it down too; stuff that we are emotionally attached to and think we need. But try looking at it all through the Lord's eyes. What's the value from His perspective? He looks at it probably like we look at the stuff of a compulsive hoarder. There's nothing here of true value. There's nothing here that is absolutely necessary or essential or all-important. It's mostly just trash that one day will be cleaned out and tossed.

I believe we all have it in our nature to be compulsive hoarders. Think of it as a spectrum or continuum. We're all on it somewhere; some more, some less. But Jesus warns us, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Lk. 12:15). He also said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (v. 34). Paul wrote, "We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world" (1 Tim. 6:6). So, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2). The earthly things you own are gifts of God meant to serve you and others. They are not meant to be caressed with your heart.

The danger here, of course, is that we confuse the created with the creator. The danger is that what we have becomes more important to us than the One who gave it to us. The danger is that our grip on our stuff becomes stronger than our grip on the things of God.

One definition of idolatry is that which you would never give up is your god. Conversely, when we give it away, we are only hastening the inevitable. When we give away the legal or emotional ownership we have on stuff, we are only doing for ourselves what death will do for us anyway. Don't love your lives or your stuff so much that your love for the Lord shrinks.

Here's the good news. Jesus died for all the misdirected emotional attachments that we put on stuff. He forgives us of our messed-up priorities.

Remember that word dissolve? In the Greek it is a derivative of the same word to loose or loosen, as in "Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18). This means not just our stuff is dissolved with time or the return of the Lord. Our sins are also dissolved . . . by the blood of Christ! They are so thoroughly broken down that they disappear altogether. He frees us from that bondage to sin.

Ecclesiastes 5 says, "If you love money, you will never be satisfied." Similarly, if you love stuff, you'll never have enough of it. However, it's also true that if you love the Lord, you'll be content. Paul said that "whether living in plenty or in want, I have learned the secret of being content" (Phil. 4:11). The secret is not setting our hearts on stuff, but on Jesus alone.

This also means we too can begin our lives anew right now. How? By stepping away from our stuff. This time of the year especially, step away from what the world and our own sinful flesh thinks is so important and focus again on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I know my grip on some things I own is too strong, but thanks be to God the Lord's grip on me is stronger still. And so, it is for you. You probably have some stuff that you love. The Lord Jesus loves you more. He promised, "No one will snatch you out of my hand" (Jn. 10:28). If not, even the devil can pry us from the Lord's hand with his strength, inanimate objects won't be able to either, especially if they have already been dissolved!

Our days are numbered because dust we are and to dust, we shall return. The lifespan of our stuff is also numbered, and it too will be dissolved. It will disappear. But the Word of the Lord stands forever. His promises stand forever. With his forgiveness he makes our sin disappear. Therefore, let us worship the LORD our God and serve only Him (Lk. 4:8). Amen.