

June 17, 2011

The following is called a Take Two. It is an attempt to expand on some of the things that happened during recent Sunday sermons. That's it.

But, the most interesting sermons are often those that happen in the minds of people in the congregation. So, feel free to respond to this email as you see fit.

Dear Friends (Known and Unknown),

In the Prayer Room the other night I was reflecting on what we heard Jesus saying from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6 a couple of Sundays ago in worship. Here are the verses:

¹⁹ *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

²² *“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

It's not unusual to read verses 19-21 with an eye toward Matthew 25:31-46, the famous vision we often call “The Sheep & the Goats.” For followers of Jesus it can be helpful to understand investing in “heavenly treasures” as investing our resources in the most vulnerable people God loves so they can know the love of God through the meeting of their deepest needs.

With the proverb in verses 22 and 23, Jesus turns things around on us. It is easy for me in this culture to become obsessed with what I take in, with what I consume. Do I eat good food? Do I watch good entertainment? Do I receive a satisfactory wage and respect from other people? Does the congregation get enough money to pay the bills? You know how it goes.

Instead Jesus asks us to focus, at least in part, on what we are putting into the world from the inside out. Are our eyes headlights shining life and light into a world that can often be full of despair? Or are they black holes revealing something dark within our hearts? This matters to Jesus.

Finally, verse 24 reminded me—oddly—of an interview Mindy and I had with another congregation during the search process that led us here to Kingwood. We had asked the Search Team where they had been noticing Jesus at work in their congregation.

One of the members got very emotional and started to cry tears of joy as he talked about his involvement in leading a Financial Peace University class on Tuesday nights. He was so happy not only

because he had seen people get their financial houses in order, but because he had seen people come to Christ through the process.

As people choose in the dollar details of their lives to place God over their money (instead of acting as if money were their god), they were often converted to a new or a deeper relationship with Jesus. They saw more clearly the active presence of God in their daily lives – their priorities, their generosity, their freedom. As their treasure shifted location, so did their hearts.

Those things have been on my mind.

As have other things. I've heard folks wonder about what Kingwood Christian's identity in the community could be -- the "what's our God-given niche" question. I've heard people talking about how to support ministries in the congregation and the larger community that they believe the Lord has placed upon their hearts. I've heard people wondering about how to put faith into practice.

And as I've just begun to get an initial sense of the congregation (hard to believe it's only been 4 months), I've also wondered things along these same lines. How can we show as a community that our worship is connected to the God who loves the whole world in Jesus (and not just a little slice called Church)? How can we bear witness that our Sunday worship extends to our Monday service and back again? How can we take joy as a community in the incredible, amazing, generous grace of God?

I have a modest proposal for your consideration based upon these things.

What if each Sunday the worship bulletins were numbered in some fashion from one to however many we make? And, what if during the Call to Offering in the service a number were to be randomly selected? And, what if the person who had that number bulletin could choose a ministry, charity, or organization to receive a \$500 check in their honor from KCC?

That person could be a thirty-year-member or a first-time-visitor. That person could have the money donated to an upcoming mission trip or to Mission Northeast or to the KCC music ministry or to a local elementary school. Ideally it would be something the person selected cares enough about to invest in his or her self.

This might sound nuts, but I don't think it is. It is also doable, if we sensed God might be nudging us to step out and make a go of it. Also, I would guess that it would be something that currently no other congregation in the area is doing. It might be something we took a holy pride in telling others about.

\$500 a Sunday is \$26K a year. This is significant money, but not huge money within the scope of our annual budget. It would also be money going directly into ministry and/or into the broader community. Along these lines, it would be a powerful witness to us and to our visitors that both Jesus' good news and his church are about being radically generous with friends and strangers alike.

If we sensed a call to make a run at this for a year, I would hope we could find at least half of the money from new sources before the Board weighed in on where to find the rest. Mindy and I would be willing to sponsor six Sundays or \$3K. This would take the new money portion down to \$10K.

The congregation would set a few broad guidelines for the type of groups that could receive the contributions (for instance, no political parties or campaigns). We could also compile a list of possible recipients. As new recipients in line with the broad guidelines were requested by people chosen in worship, those groups could be added to the list for future use.

Almost inevitably there will be some selections not everyone loves, but being part of a maturing Christian community is dealing with those things in an increasingly Christ-like and graceful manner. In addition, this practice could be construed as a raffle (aka a form of gambling). True enough; but it doesn't seem like the practice would breed addiction, and no cash money would be given to "the winners." My initial sense is that the benefits would far outweigh these issues. And, as weird as it always has sounded to me, in Acts chapter 1 the replacement disciples for Judas, a guy named Matthias, is chosen by dice. This idea is not nearly as extreme as that.

Anyway, that's what I'm thinking. What about y'all?

Peace in Christ,

Robert