

Earrings, Tiny Houses, and Football  
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
August 10, 2025  
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I know, it's counter intuitive to start a sermon about this gospel, by focusing on stuff. Particularly when the text begins by telling us to sell our possessions. Yet, this gospel has me wondering: What things do we value? Why do we value them?

A story. The parish I served in Maine held a Christmas fair every year, it included a jewelry resale table. Members of the parish would drop off our unwanted jewelry, pieces we hadn't worn in years, gifts that didn't suit us, and jewelry from relatives' estates, you get the picture. And a jeweler in the parish would repair, shine, and price the pieces. There were some amazing things for sale, and a table of everyday stuff. It was a great way for kids to buy mom and grandmom a pair of earrings, or a broach.

One year I went through my pile of earrings and such and drop off a bag for the sale. Only to unwrap a pair of my old earrings on Christmas morning. My girls had seen this pair of silver earrings, and thought they looked like something I'd like. They were right in more ways than they knew. Because of course at some point, I had purchased them because I liked them. And then I donated them. But now that my girls had given them to me - they are special. They've become my go-to pair of everyday earrings. Still not fancy or expensive jewelry, but valuable to me. Because they now remind me of that funny Christmas morning, and my girls shopping with their babysitting money at the Christmas fair.

What things do we value? Why do we value them? Survivors of fires, floods, or other natural disasters rarely lament the loss of their high-priced stuff. It's the photos and family heirlooms which are heart breaking losses. Because they reflect people, relationships, connections.

Second story. On Friday morning, I read an article in the New York Times about The Bird's Nest, an intentional community of retired women living together on a piece of property in Texas.<sup>1</sup> They each live in their own tiny house, and there is shared communal space. These 11 women were attracted to this life, because it offers less to tend and clean and manage, while providing independent living, and being part of an interdependent community. Honestly, it sounds pretty good. Less to worry about, so we can focus on what really matters.

I'm not suggesting we sell our homes immediately and buy tiny houses. Though the instruction in our gospel to "sell your possessions and give alms" isn't meant to be figurative. Luke means it. In the book of Acts, he describes the earliest followers of Jesus living in communities that sell their things and pool their resources. Ensuring that there is enough to go around, and to share with the poor and oppressed.

Given our culture of rampant capitalism, these early communities of Christians seem way too radical. Which is what I found appealing about the community in Texas - it's something I can

imagine here and now. And if I'm honest, so much of what's attractive about their model is obtainable - where I am. If I'm willing to do the work of shedding the stuff of this life... or more of it anyway. Get rid of the stuff that is getting in my way, shift the ownership dynamic at least. So, I own my stuff, but my stuff doesn't own me. Hold it all lightly and focus on what matters more. Which is definitely something I can do NOW.

Though it may mean reordering my day-to-day priorities. Because it requires a different kind of awareness, one that pays attention, slows down, breathes deeply, appreciates the little moments of joy, of beauty, of kindness. And doing so, not just because it sounds like a nice idea, (and living in a tiny house sounds like a vacation)! But because this kind of awareness and lifestyle is a gospel value.

Our text continues - "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." I don't think this is a threat - so much as an admonition to get our priorities in order. NOW. Because as much as we like to pretend otherwise, our lives are not in our control. Ask anyone recovering from an accident, or dealing with a difficult diagnosis, or reeling from any abrupt unanticipated change. It's stunning how quickly everything can shift, and we become aware of how little is in our control.

Be ready, Jesus says. Because it could all change in an instant; be ready NOW. Live the life you are called to live NOW. Which means how we spend our time should reflect what really matters to us, our values, and what we love. Because there's no guarantee that we'll have the time to do it later.

Last story. Friday night there was a preseason football game between the Lions and Falcons, in which a young man, Morice Norris, was badly injured. Norris, 24 years old, was hoping to make the roster for the Lions, and was injured when his head collided with the knee of an opposing player. Norris went down, motionless. While the athletic training staff tended to him, members of teams took a knee and waited. And waited some more, as the severity of the situation became clear. Emergency medical staff boarded him and put him in an ambulance - while the players and coaches watched.

Because all play goes through the NFL league office, following the injury and the long wait, the game had to resume. But the head coaches for the teams had a different plan. With just under 15 minutes of the game remaining, the teams took the field, and the Falcons snapped the ball. The quarterback received the snap, and stood with the ball in his hands, while all the other players on both sides stood nearby. Then with 13 minutes to go, Lions and Falcons players gathered in a circle near mid-field - arms locked, ball still in the quarterback's hands, and they said a prayer while the game clock counted down.

The fans clapped, and game announcer Jason Benetti described it for the broadcast,  
It's one of the beautiful reminders of how we are all connected in life.  
No matter what color you're wearing, what helmet you're wearing,  
no matter what belief you have, somebody's down and hurt.

You don't know about them. You take care of your heart and their heart and everybody's heart in the building and beyond -... the Lions and the Falcons have given everybody a lesson in humanity tonight.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, with 6 minutes or so remaining in the game the NFL office suspended play and called the game. The reports are encouraging - Morice Norris is recovering well.<sup>3</sup>

Norris posted an update yesterday, assuring everyone that he's fine, and appreciates all the love and concern. His post included a quote about being grateful to God, noting 1 Thessalonians 5:18: *Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Norris added:

Gratitude shifts our prayers from a list of requests to a conversation filled with love and faith. Remember no matter what you are going through, there is always something to thank God for, and when you do, you feel [God's] peace."<sup>4</sup>

Friends, we are called to live the lives we've been given by God - to the best of our ability. 'Best' - not in ways the world measures best - but in the ways of Jesus. Love God, love our neighbors - those we've been given to love, and those in need of our care. Appreciate the blessings of this life and share them with others. Use whatever power or authority or position we have to contribute to the flourishing of others.

As children of God, we don't have to buy into the world's narrative of fear and scarcity. Instead, we can trust in God's good pleasure. Paying attention to what really matters - the people and relationships of our lives, the ways our lives are intertwined. We are called by God to a grace-filled interdependence with God and one another. **That's** the treasure, **that's** the kingdom of God, here and now. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Miller, "11 Women, 9 Dogs, Not Much Drama (and No Guys), New York Times, August 7, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Coulton Pouncy, Lions and Falcons come together, do the right thing after Morice Norris' injury, The Athletic, posted in the New York Times online version, August 9, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Coulton Pouncy, Lions and Falcons come together, do the right thing after Morice Norris' injury, The Athletic, posted in the New York Times online version, August 9, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Dave Birkett, "Detroit Lions' Morice Norris expected to return home today after scary injury," Detroit Free Press, August 9, 2025.