

# Saving One's Life & Giving One's Life

Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 10-28  
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One of the most traumatic experiences that can happen to any of us is downsizing a household. It can occur when we move from one place to a smaller place and have to get rid of some things. It occurs frequently when at a "certain age" we decide to sell the place in which we have been living—and accumulating—for decades and move into something more appropriate, smaller, with less storage space, smaller bookshelves. It can be traumatic.

At a recent clergy gathering, it was the subject of much conversation. One admitted he delays even thinking about the subject. Another acknowledged a fair amount of good-natured domestic tension generated between a spouse who is a determined, enthusiastic downsizer and one who is an equally determined, enthusiastic saver.

It reminded me of being in Madison during Moving Day on campus. Of course this happens all over college campuses, but the UW brings with it Moving Day on a different scale than most. Chairs, mattresses, sofas with a lot of beer stains, boxes galore. In particular, I remember a young couple that must have been rooming together on Gorham Street, having a serious argument about whether to keep an ottoman. Downsizing is traumatic.

I went into the house of a parishioner in a different appointment who, as it turned out was what we'd call "a hoarder." There were narrow aisles just wide enough to make your way through from one room to another. Susan was so embarrassed. She was in tears because of her embarrassment but also, as she said to me, "Life isn't supposed to be this way."

One of the interesting new developments in the American culture is the appearance everywhere of self-storage facilities: everywhere you go, long rows of locked compartments to store what people have accumulated.

I saw a magazine article recently which described "the booming self-storage industry that taps into Americans' boundless ability to accumulate." There is more than 82 square miles of rentable self-storage space; more than three times the size of the island of Manhattan; 24 square feet of storage space for every American.

What's that about; our obsessive accumulating, and our unwillingness to let go? Is it because for years we have been bombarded with the message that our happiness, our fulfillment as persons, our salvation if you will, depends on our ability to purchase, own, and enjoy the right automobile, jewelry, clothing, to travel to the right places, to live at the right address? Is it because for most of our lives we have been bombarded with the message that there will always be more of everything, that it is our God-given right to expect and enjoy more, no limitations on anything?

Wendell Berry says, "We desire more which makes us feel incomplete, unsatisfied, which makes us want more.

It is almost a misplaced faith, an investment of trust and resources and energy in the wrong place.

It happens in the Christian faith as well. An article entitled, "Does God Want You to Be Wealthy?" told about an emerging trend within American Protestantism – especially of the televangelists, called, "Prosperity Theology." It's the idea that a God who loves you wants you to be wealthy and comes close to promising that if you believe, you will be rewarded.

I confess, it "ticks me off;" the way Christian faith, Jesus himself, is literally hijacked and transformed into some management guru, whom to follow is to be successful in your career, marriage, relationships, to be healthy and wealthy.

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What he said was this: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." What he said on this topic surely ranks among the most important things he—or anyone else—ever said: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."

He came to show us that we are beloved children of God. He came to show us that there is a God who loves us. He died for that love. And he came to show us what human life—authentic, genuine human life—looks like. He came to expose all the schemes to produce the wholeness and freedom and happiness and salvation for which we, all of us, desperately long

He said, "Follow me." He said give your life away in love and you will save it. He said give your life to those you love: your children, your beloveds whoever they are; give your life and love and your resources to the causes and institutions that make the world a more Godly and therefore more human place. Give your life away and you will be utterly alive, he said.

And, he warned, you hold tightly to what you have—don't give your love and passion and energy and money, but save it, hoard it, store it—and you will lose the life you are so desperately trying to save.

The promise is not that if you give you will become successful and wealthy. It's more important than that. The promise is that if you give you will be alive.

But that's why today's passage from Mark is all about: transforming you and me into what God wants us to be—people who know how to give and therefore how to live. That's what Jesus Christ came for: to teach us how to live our one and only life, to teach us how to love and give our lives away, to teach us how to be alive.

That's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God! Amen.