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## 1 John 2:15-17 “Decide What Is Important”

The book of 1 John was written to a cluster of churches in Asia Minor, which on today’s map is Turkey. For centuries, the church has attributed this book to the Apostle John, one of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. It’s clear that John had a close relationship to these churches because he refers to them as “my children” or “little children.” These churches were having a hard time. There were all kinds of voices out there spreading confusion about who Jesus was and what Jesus stood for. Sounds a little bit like our world today, doesn’t it? So John brings them back to center: Stay rooted in the truth and let that truth show up in how you love each other. The passage Lori read is instructive –

Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.

Even though he starts out by saying, “Do not love the world and the things of the world” this isn’t just about not loving material things. It’s about what shapes our lives. It’s about what matters most. He’s drawing contrasts between what is temporary versus what is eternal. He’s showing the difference between consumption and calling. He distinguishes appearance from purpose. The world trains us to chase after that which is immediate, visible, and impressive. But the gospel calls us to invest in what is lasting, meaningful and often unseen. So, the real question is, “What is actually worth giving your life to?”

Every day we make choices about how we use our time, our resources and our energy. And when I say “energy” I mean our attention. What am I going to do today? Am I going to wake up and immediately start doom scrolling news feeds on my phone to find out what terrible things are

going on in the world? And please understand me, I'm not saying you shouldn't keep up with what's going on. That's important. But is that *really* what I should be doing before I even get out of bed? Is that the best way to prioritize my day? Probably not.

Here's what I've discovered though. Most of us don't really *decide* what matters most – we sort of “drift” into it, right? We like to think we have complete power over what happens in a day, but sometimes *the day* decides where your time and attention goes whether you like it or not. And yes, as autonomous human beings with the power of choice we *could* say “no,” but we know what kind of a circus our day would turn into if we did. I saw the funniest coffee cup last week. It said, “Oh shoot! This *is* my monkey! And this *is* my circus!”

In college, I had a mentor who said the most important lesson church leaders need to learn is, “Decide what is important – do it. Decide what is not important – don't do it.” Easier said than done, but it makes sense. It's simple prioritization. And for the most part, it works. But then in seminary, another mentor said, “No, the most important lesson for church leaders is, ‘plan ahead, be flexible.’” Underneath both of those is this truth – you *still* have to decide what matters. You still have to prioritize. The second lesson just gives you some wiggle room when things go south.

John lays out three desires that those who love the world struggle with: The desire of the eyes, or that which looks good. Pride in riches, or the things that impress others. And desires of the flesh or that which feels good at the moment. None of these desires are evil in and of themselves. We like things that are aesthetically pleasing. We feel good about the rewards for our hard work and the toys we can buy with those rewards. I won't elaborate on “desires of the flesh” but who doesn't like feeling good, right? But all of these things are temporary. They fade away eventually. In contrast, John lifts up love, service, community, faithfulness, and changed lives. These things are not temporary. They are the things that actually last.

I think our church does a good job at discerning between that which fades and that which lasts. We have a song in our Chalice Praise book that starts out, “Build your hope on things eternal, hold to God’s unchanging hand.” Think about some of the things we do: Our healing circle provides support to people who are living with chronic illness. We have a women’s ministry that pays attention to needs in our church and finds creative ways of resourcing ministries that address those needs. We have our Koinonia Krafters group who work on projects that are often used to provide comfort for people who need some extra loving and care like prayer shawls, baby caps, and things that are sold at our annual Holiday Bazaar which raises money, again, to meet needs in our community. We provide Sunday school for both children and adults, and I know Sacred Grounds doesn’t like to be called “Sunday School,” but both provide people with the tools that shape and build our faith and practice. Then there’s our weekly Bible study to help people understand our sacred scriptures so we have a better understanding of why we do the things we do. Our music group and our Blue Cloud Arts Production provides ways to express our faith by tapping into our creativity and sharing the good news in a more imaginative way. And never underestimate the value of Bunco and Guess Who’s Coming to Brunch! Look at this group! Fellowship is a way to strengthen ties with each other which makes for a stronger faith community. Even our outreach ministries become fellowship opportunities. Yes, the Uplift Boutique provides resources for foster families, but check this out - it has become a twice a week fellowship group complete with coffee and cookies!

So yes, we have decided what matters, and we are doing it. And this capital campaign that we started is just one more moment where we decide what matters. We’re providing security so that people who come to this building to enjoy these ministries can feel safe. We’re upgrading our heating and air conditioning so people can be comfortable and so we can better utilize our solar panels and cut our utility bills. We’re sprucing up our facilities so that it looks and feels more welcoming. We’re transitioning into drought resistant landscaping so that we can be better

stewards of our resources and look good doing it! These aren't just projects, they're ways we support the kind of ministry we do already.

When we turn in our pledges today, you're not just turning in a card. You are naming what matters to you. You are acting on what you believe. You are trusting God with something real and tangible. What you put on that card isn't between you and me. It's between you and God. Because this isn't just about a pledge. It's not about numbers or finances, it's about what we believe matters most. John reminds us "*The world and its desires are passing away.*" All the things that seem urgent, all the things that demand our attention, all the things that promise so much, they don't last. But, "*those who do the will of God live forever.*" Those who invest in love, in community, in lives being changed, those things endure. So today we're not just turning in cards. We're making a decision. We're deciding what matters. And we're choosing together to invest in something that lasts.

We're going to do something a little different this morning. The Board of Church Extension recommends we do this. It's part of their program, and they tell every church to do it. No excuses. When I read it I thought, "this seems silly." It's too performative. It seems to go against what we've been saying for the last four weeks. But Rosario said, "No, this is important! You need to do this." And as we've learned, Rosario is insistent.

Here's what we're going to do: I'm going to invite those who are able to come forward to place your pledge in our basket here as a sign of what you believe God is calling you to invest in. Trusting that every gift is part of something larger than ourselves. If you've already turned in your pledge, that's fine. Grab a card and bring it up anyway. This is symbolic more than anything else. If you haven't turned in a card, but you aren't able to pledge, write "I pledge to keep this campaign lifted up in prayer" on your card. Josh has prepared a song of thanksgiving to sing as we bring our gifts forward. After you've returned to your seats, we'll have a prayer of dedication, and then we'll sing our song of invitation, have our

time of prayer and we'll close with communion as we typically do. This is an act of faith and an act of thanksgiving. In the African American churches in Virginia, this is how offering is taken, and most of the time people dance as they come forward. I don't expect you to do that. The song Josh chose isn't exactly one that's easy to dance to, but nevertheless, come to the table with joy.