

Good morning, Church!

My name is Brett Hardy and I am the Director of Emerging Generations here at First Presbyterian Church of Edmond and it's so good to be here in worship with you this morning.

Matthew 26:18-20 says:

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

PRAY

A little over a year ago, my family bought a new house.

We had been scoping out the real estate market for quite a while... and we had looked at several homes... And from all our research, we had really narrowed in on exactly what we were looking for.

We just hadn't found it.

Until one day, Madelinn showed me a home on the app on her phone, in a neighborhood that we had looked at before and that we really loved. And this particular home was actually very similar to another home that we had looked at and had really considered buying but the other one was a just little too large and they wanted too much for it.

But on this day – the one that Madelinn showed me...

It was perfect.

It was in the location we wanted. The neighborhood we wanted...

It had the yard we wanted.

It had the square footage we wanted.

It had the layout and features we wanted.

There was only one problem.

The entire home needed to be remodeled.

And that was evident even before we went and looked at it in person. We could tell that this was the case simply by the pictures that were posted online. This home had only had one owner – who built the home in 1975. And there was basically nothing updated or new in the home since that date.

But you know what?

We loved it.

And we bought it.

And so right after we moved in, we had some professional contractors come out and start doing some bidding to start getting the home remodeled. You see our plan was to go ahead and get it remodeled right away when we first moved in...

That is... until the bids started coming back. And I started looking at these numbers.

And I wondered... *what in the world have we done?*

See, as the numbers started to come back to us from the contractors – we began to think to ourselves. Well – you know what... This 1975 ranch isn't so bad in the condition it's in after all!

Who needs new flooring when you can just cover up old carpet stains with some new rugs!?

Who needs new doors on the bedrooms?

Just ignore those holes in the doors and those door handles that are falling off!

Who needs new counter tops and paint and appliances? We can do without all of that!

Until one day... I took one of these three page bid sheets that had been sent to us from the contractors...

And I went to Lowes... And I started to do some math.

And I began to realize that the cost of the material really wasn't the problem after all. The problem... was the cost of the labor.

And I realized this when I began to understand that the difference between the cost of the new wood floors and the cost of the new wood floors *being installed by a professional* who knew what we was doing – was 34 cartons of wood.

In other words... It was going to cost me the equivalent of 34 more cartons of wood to have the pro's install it. And I began to think to myself...

Is there any way that I could install this wood floor myself?

Now... listen... I've never done this before....

I don't know the first thing about laying a wood floor or installing doors or putting up sheet rock or remodeling a home. All of this involves a lot of things that I'm really just not that skilled in...

No one has ever accused me of being a "handy man".

But I went to Madelinn and I said:

"Hey... listen. I'm going to be honest. I don't know whether or not I can do this. But here is what I do know. Surely, I can figure this out.... And there is no way that I'm going to screw up 34 cartons of wood. So.... Listen.... Even if I screw up 33. We have still saved money. Because having the professionals do it would be like paying for 34 extra cartons..."

Now... let me reiterate.

I've never laid wood flooring before. I do not know the first thing about wood flooring.

At this point a year ago my current reality was this: I bought a giant toolbox in 2013 that was full of all kinds of tools in our garage – *and most of them I knew how to use...*

But it became pretty evident after watching the first couple of YouTube videos about laying wood floors that that toolbox in my garage did not have the tools I was going to need to lay new wood floors.

And so, as I stood in my living room about a year ago...

I was faced with a dilemma. We could just live in a house that we had really hoped to remodel... but that we really didn't want to pay the money for the professional to do the work.

Or... I could learn how to use some new tools. I could learn how to do the work that was before me – with new equipment that I had never used or owned before – but that was the necessary tools for the work that lay ahead.

That was a year ago.

Today – I'm happy to report to you...

We have new wood floors in our home. And I only screwed up one carton of wood.

What does this have to do with anything? Church – as we look at the reality before us today – when it comes to the challenges that lie ahead... I think it's fair to say that we are currently standing here in our living room this morning with a choice to make.

You see, the work that needs done to reach a lost and dying and broken world with the love and the hope and the grace and the mercy and the message of Jesus Christ – that work – we have to realize – looks different than it did before.

For many of us – over the past ten, fifteen years the work has changed while we were in the middle of it! For some of us - it's just simply not the work we thought it was when our journey started. The world has changed a lot. The world *is changing a lot* – and continues to change - and the people and the culture and the atmosphere outside of these walls – the reports keep coming back from the professionals who are doing the research and they are telling us that the estimates are much different than we thought they would be...

Reaching the world with the message of Jesus - it's just not what we thought we had bargained for. And many of the ways that we had thought we would reach the world around us – the programs and the methods and the tools - those ways just don't work anymore.

For many of us – myself included - the programs and the methods that we have grown comfortable with using – the ones that we have had in our toolkit all along – those tools will not cut it when it comes to the task that is at hand.

And so Church – we are standing in our living room and we have a choice to make. We can choose to ignore the situation.

We can throw some new rugs on the old stains and pretend it's not there. We can say – you know what... it's not as bad as we thought. We can just ignore it!

Or, church we can learn to use some new tools.

And this morning... I'm excited to share with you that I believe that many of the tools we need for the task that lay ahead – are actually tools we already have. The truth is... we may just need to be reminded of how to use them.

Let me say that again for those of you who may have been getting nervous about where I was going with all this!

See – I'm not suggesting that our message change. I'm not advocating for a watered-down version of the Gospel. I'm not campaigning for an easier path that doesn't account for the realities of truly following Jesus. No! Not at all!

In fact – I’m here to tell you that I believe you already have exactly what you need for the work that lays ahead. And I want us to take a second look in our tool kit and re-learn how to use some tools.

You may remember that last February I told you that I would use my time with you throughout the year to share about our core practices here at First Pres.

For those of you that don’t know what it is I’m talking about – our church has seven core practices – seven statements if you will – that you can find hanging on banners or printed on signs throughout our building.

These seven statements serve as a sort of filter or framework for what we as a body of believers will commit to and what we will seek to be about.

Those seven statements are:

1. Share who we are.
2. Care for one another.
3. Read and practice Scripture.
4. Pray together.
5. Invest in people.
6. Serve one another.
7. Create and send leaders.

And I know that I share this every time I talk about this – but I just have to say again, and I’ll just keep saying it – I really love that our church established this and that our elders many years ago were obedient when they were led by God to put these together and call us as a body of believers to be about these things.

As someone who has been on staff here for the past four years – I can share with you that having these seven statements in place as a guide for how we operate – is a wonderful thing.

And so, this morning - as we look at the Word of God together... and as we consider how Scripture influences and directs and guides us in our pursuit of these things...

I have something exciting that I want to say to you! I believe that these are the tools we need. I believe with all of my heart that if we as a church.

If we as a body of believers.

If we as a people committed to doing life together. Arm in arm – alongside one another.

If we will lean into these things with all of our heart...

That these are the tools we need to see an entire generation come to faith in Jesus Christ. And this morning, and next Sunday... I want to talk about how two of these core practices, I believe, are great places to start.

And so to get you thinking about where it is that I want us to go this morning...

I want you to consider this question:

Why are you here this morning?

Why are you here this morning?

Now, you may hear me ask that question and you may think to yourself – what on earth are you talking about?

Why would you say that? Why are you here?

Why would you ask such a straightforward and strange question in a sermon? Brett – we want to be a welcoming and hospitable church where anyone and everyone can come and experience the love and grace and mercy of Jesus.

Why would you ask such a direct question?

Because I mean it. And I want you to answer it. Not out loud, of course. But before we go any further this morning. I want you to answer this question.

Why are you here today?

Now, let me frame up a few things that I want you to think about as you consider this. Let me start with what I don't mean when I ask you this question:

I don't mean, what is going on in your life today that brought you to church this morning?

Certainly – that is incredibly important, and I do want you to be aware of what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life right now.

But specifically... for just a few moments here... I want you to think about this:

Who in your life played a role in the fact that you are in this room today?

Did someone invite you here today? *Who?*

Did someone encourage you to check out church? *Who?*

Did someone start bringing you to church as a child and over time you developed your own faith, and as you grew older it grew into a rhythm of attending and participating in church?

Who did that?

Did you attend church as a child but sort of drifted away for a season and have recently felt a nudge to return to church?

Who in your life – whether it was years ago – or just recently... *who planted those seeds?*

Maybe you are here this morning because you have some sort of job or role to play...

Maybe this morning you are here because you are a camera operator... or you are singing in the choir or you are running the media... or you are a greeter or a door holder or a deacon or an elder or a volunteer or a Sunday school teacher... or you are on staff here at First Pres...

Let me ask you - *who invited you or asked you or challenged you to serve in that capacity?*

Seriously!

I want you to take just a moment and think about *why* you are here this morning. Because listen – here is the honest reality that I want us to grapple with this morning.

You are here today, because someone, somewhere, at some point along the way, invested in you - in some capacity.

Let me say that again: You are here today... because someone, somewhere, at some point along the way, invested in you – some capacity.

And let me just share with you – that I am no different. I am here today because my parents invested in my faith. They brought me to church, and they took me to student ministry, and they modeled what it meant to follow Jesus as adults.

I'm here today because when I was in high school the new youth pastor at our church– a guy named Mike, saw what God was doing in my life and started calling it out in me. He took me under his wing and showed me what it meant to serve the church. He talked with me about what it was like to raise a family and be a pastor at the same time. He gave me opportunities to learn and grow and exercise the gifts and talents and passions God had given me. And sometimes... that went really well – and other times it did not go well at all!

But listen Church - believe me when I say – no one is in this room today by accident.

Every single person here, is here because someone invested in you enough - for you to make the choice to be here today.

For some of us, that investment has looked like a mom or a dad or a grandparent consistently bringing us to church. Maybe even when we didn't really want to go. And eventually that began to translate into our own faith.

For some of us, that investment has looked like a co-worker or a neighbor or a friend coming alongside of us in the season that we were in and seeing what the Holy Spirit was doing and being willing to say: "*hey, come to church with me.*" Or, "*hey – have you thought about trying church again*"?

The investment that brought us to this room today has looked different for every single one of us.

For some of us it was people who put their blood sweat and tears into us. They journeyed with us through bad decisions and offered mercy and grace to us. Consistently nudging us back towards Jesus and his church.

For some of us it was people who saw what God was doing in us. They saw how we were wired and what brought us joy and what our passion was. And they took a chance on us and asked us to come alongside them in service to God's Church.

For some of us the investment looked like a conversation that we just didn't expect – but it ultimately led to us choosing to turn towards Jesus and his church.

And let me be clear – we have not all experienced the same level of investment. Some of us have experienced a deep, life-long investment from someone. Others of us, we may be able to name a name... or remember a couple of things – but the investment that brought us here today, *on the surface* - it may not look as significant as others.

And that's exactly what I want to challenge us to consider today. You see – the investment that *we often see* – sometimes it doesn't look really big.

Sometimes we see the investment as a small thing. Inconsequential, almost. We look back on a conversation or a lunch or an invitation, and we don't think much of it.

But – let us take notice today – that every investment that brought each of us here today –

Whether we see it as a lifelong journey we've walked with someone, or a quick encounter along the way.

Every investment... had eternal implications.

If you are here today, or you are listening today – the reality is that you are engaging in something that has eternal impact. You are participating in the Kingdom of God right now – at this very moment. You are amongst the people of God – worshipping the one true God – and reading from the very Words spoken by God.

And so let us acknowledge that there are eternal implications for our time here together today.

And because of that – let us recognize the fact that someone, somewhere, at some point along the way, invested in you in some capacity - for you to be here engaging with those eternal implications today. Each of them different. Each of them varying in levels of investment.

Each of them having eternal impact.

You see one of our core practices here at First Presbyterian Church of Edmond that I already mentioned and that I want us to wrestle with this morning is this: “Invest in People”.

Church – can I ask you this morning.... *Who are you investing in today?*

Who are you investing in today?

Now, let me be clear – I’m not asking you who are you pouring your every waking moment in to? Now – for some of us - that may be the investment we are making. *But not all of us.* I’m just asking **you** to consider: who are **you** investing in?

Who – five, ten, fifteen, twenty years from now may be sitting in a church sanctuary somewhere wrestling with the eternal implications of their own life – because you invested in them?

Because ...You had a lunch with them and shared the truth of Jesus with them...

You counseled them through a season of life...

You called, showed up, and were consistently present...

You didn’t shy away from the hard moments with them...

You shared the Gospel of Jesus with them...

You brought them to church...

Church – you are here today because someone invested in you. Who will be here because you are investing in them?

Because let's be honest for a moment. If the answer to that question is.... No one.

Can I just ask you... Will there be anyone sitting in these church sanctuary's... five... ten... fifteen years from now?

Now – let me just be clear with you this morning. Because I want to make sure that I'm just laying it out there. If you are thinking to yourself...

Does the Bible **command** me to “invest in someone”? Does it explicitly say – “hey, in order to follow Jesus – you need to invest in another person”?

If you are someone that just needs that assurance that “so long as the Bible doesn't say it – then I'm not going to worry about it”... **Maybe** – you can leave here today and wash your hands of what it is that I'm talking about...

Or can you?

You see – no... you may not find an explicit command to take someone to church. To take them to lunch. To share your life with them. If you are looking for the Bible to spell it out for you in that practical of terms in order for you to acknowledge it's importance then maybe you can feel comfortable walking out of here today thinking that this just isn't all that important....

But here's what I want you to know: I believe that the Scriptures do give us the tools we need to see an entire generation reached with the message of Jesus. I believe that the Scriptures show us exactly what to do and how to use the tools we have been given...

You see, the writer of Romans says in Romans 10 verse fourteen:

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

If you were to take the verbs in these verse and work your way backwards... You will see that in order for those who do not know Jesus...

In order for the world outside of these walls to experience the message of Jesus Christ – Someone has to be sent to tell them. And in order for them to hear the message of Jesus and the love and salvation and the grace and mercy that he offers them – that sent person must TELL

THEM! Because in order for them to believe and to follow Jesus - they must hear - from that sent person - the message of Jesus!

Now – this is the place that for many of us – *We see an out.*

See when I began to get those bids back from the contractors about how much it was going to cost to remodel our home. There was a part of me standing in my living room that day that thought...

You know what... This is my out.

We may not have to endure all the mess of a remodel after all! Certainly, I wanted to see our house remodeled... But don't get me wrong – there was a part of me that thought...

You know – Maybe this will work out just fine... Maybe we don't really need the mess.

See Church – for many of us... we see these words in Romans and we say:

Well, I'm not a preacher. That's not my gift. That's not my talent. That's not what I'm called to do. And we see an out. But if you consider the words of Scripture-

And the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 25 I think the picture begins to get a little clearer about how this is supposed to work... You see in Matthew chapter twenty-five beginning in verse fourteen we see Jesus having a conversation about "talents".

He says this:

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful

servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Now – let me just clarify a couple of things about this Scripture... In the world at the time of this writing – a talent was a weight of money. A pretty significant amount of money.

There is some debate amongst scholars about just how much a talent from this era would be worth today... But all scholars are in agreement that it's no small amount of money.

And so we see in this story – this scenario where Jesus is with his disciples, and they have are having a conversation about what it will look like when the Kingdom of God is ushered in and the world as we know it no longer exists...

And Jesus shares this really interesting story – this parable... *about servants and talents.*

And about how a master had left all these varying degrees of money with his servants and how some of them invested it and got a return on their investment... but one of them buried it and did absolutely nothing with it because he was scared of losing it.

Now keep in mind... If you back up in these Scriptures to try and figure out why this conversation is happening you will see in Matthew chapter twenty-four, verse three - that the disciples have asked Jesus to tell them what it will look like when the end is coming.

And he goes on to share this story.

Now – why would Jesus tell a story about the importance of investing money when it comes to the end of the world? Clearly – if you read Scripture, you can discern that we are not taking any earthly money with us into the Kingdom of God. That our earthly money has no value in the Kingdom of God. So – why would Jesus be advocating for *more money*?

Why is the master so upset with the servant in this story about burying his money and being scared of losing it and not making any money off the talent he had been given? He is so upset to the point that he says – you could have at least earned an interest on my money! What is this all about?

What if it's not about money at all?

Romans chapter twelve, beginning in verse four says:

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Do you see what just happened here?

You see – this is where it’s amazing that the English word that we use for the money that was talked about in Matthew 24 – is the word “talent”. Because it’s almost as if you could substitute the word “talent” in every single sentence that the writer of Romans just spelled out.

In fact – let’s just do that... Let’s just plug the word “talent” into this Scripture here in Romans:

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same TALENTS, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having TALENTS that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if YOUR TALENT IS prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if YOUR TALENT IS service, in our serving; the one whose TALENT IS TO teaches, in his teaching; the one whose TALENT IS TO exhorts, in his exhortation; the one whose TALENT IS TO contributes, in generosity; the one whose TALENT IS TO leads, with zeal; the one whose TALENT IS acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

See all of a sudden – Matthew 25 - and the story about the servants and the talents....

Is no longer about money. It’s about our lives. It’s about our passions. It’s about our time. It’s about our gifts and our talents. It’s about our resources. And what we do with those things.

It’s about ***WHO WE ARE INVESTING IN.***

And so, if we thought that Romans chapter ten was giving us an “out” on this whole deal because some of us don’t have the “gift” of preaching...

Two chapters later... in Romans chapter twelve. We see that every single one of us has a way of investing in someone.

Some of us invest with our preaching and our teaching.

Some of us invest with how we encourage and counsel someone.

Some of us invest with how we serve someone.

Some of us invest with how we give of our money.

Some of us invest with how we show mercy.

And some of us invest by how we lead others.

But every single one of us has been given something that is to be shared with someone else.

You are here today, because someone, somewhere, at some point along the way, invested in you - in some capacity. And Church – there is someone in your life today that Jesus intends for them to be able to say that they are going to be where they are in their own faith journey... in five, ten, fifteen years from now... Because you invested in them.

In his book “Canoeing the Mountains” Tod Bolsinger writes about Lewis and Clark and the expedition that they set out on and how they had expected to find a waterway to the pacific ocean. They expected the climax of their expedition to lead to a place where they would put their canoes in the water and row all the way to the ocean. Instead....

They found the Rocky Mountains.

The tools that they had been using up to that point would not get them through the mountains that lay ahead.

And church – the same is true for us today.

We – myself included – we expected to find easy sailing when it came to sharing the message of Jesus Christ. We expected the next generation to get it the same way we got it and to simply show up to our programs engage in our methods and follow in our footsteps.

But we’ve hit the Rocky Mountains.

But there’s good news: We have the tools we need for the adventure that lay ahead.

Each and every single one of us were given them the moment we were born. And so, I ask you – and I’m asking myself – what has Jesus given me?

What am I supposed to be investing in those around me?

Do you have the gift of encouragement? *Encourage!*

Do you have the gift of teaching? *Teach!*

Do you have the gift of leading? *Lead!*

Do you have the gift of mercy? *Offer it!*

Do you have the gift of compassion? *Show it!*

For some of us we may not have used these tools in a while. Maybe we've never used them before at all...

A year ago, I was standing in my living room, and I had a choice to make... I could learn how to use some new tools or I could throw in the towel...

Right now, we're standing in our living room... and we have a choice to make.

Will we learn how to use the tools we've been given and invest in those around us...? Or, will we ignore the carpet stains and throw a rug over it and pretend it's not that bad after all...?

Jesus seemed to imply that this was something to take pretty seriously... When talking about the world as we know it coming to an end... and the Kingdom of God being ushered in... He chose to tell a story about investing. He chose to tell a story about a person who was too scared of what might happen if they invested what they had been given... well, things didn't go so well for that person...

What have you been given?

What can you invest?

Who can you invest in?

Matthew chapter 26 beginning in verse 18 says:

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

PRAY.