

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 6:19-21

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 6

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Scripture Lesson: John 3:16-17

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 88

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Response to the Word

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 6:19-21 and John 3:16-17

01/18/2026 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

What’s On the Other Side?

John Nestell, Guest Preacher

Hello... I’m Kermit’s cousin.

Bud.

Bud... Weiser.

I’ve been living in the swamp for a long time. Most of my life, actually, I sit around on a lily pad, catch a few flies, then jump off and go for a swim. It’s not glamorous—but it’s honest work.

But one day, while I was sitting there doing absolutely nothing productive, I saw something different: A rainbow. The same kind Kermit sings about. And it was beautiful. It made me start wondering... what’s on the other side of the swamp?

That’s when a bird flew down and tried to eat me—so I had to jump off my lily pad and swim away as fast as my little webbed feet and legs could take me.

Which reminded me of something important.

Despite the dangers...

Despite the hazards...

Despite the birds that want to turn me into lunch...

This swamp is still my home.

Now can you believe there are people who want to drain the swamp?

If they drain it... where will I go?Have you seen the housing market lately?

Why would anyone want to drain the swamp? Swamps act as natural filters, improving water quality by trapping pollutants. Swamps provide critical habitat—for frogs like me and a whole lot of other wildlife. Swamps help regulate the climate by storing carbon and reducing greenhouse gases. Swamps protect shorelines from erosion and soften the blow of flooding. Swamps recharge groundwater supplies, keeping aquifers alive. Swamps support recreation and tourism, helping local economies thrive. So maybe when people say “drain the swamp,” they mean something else.

But what do I know? I'm just a frog.

Still... I'll keep loving my home—even if it is a swamp.

And Kermit and I?

We'll keep dreaming.

Dreaming about what could be... And wondering what's waiting for us on the other side of the rainbow. "The lovers, the dreamers, and me."

They are the people who believe in the magical, hopeful, and sometimes elusive idea of the Rainbow Connection.

The lovers are those who seek connection—companionship, belonging, and emotional fulfillment.

The dreamers are those filled with hope, imagination, and holy ambition—people who look beyond the ordinary and believe that extraordinary things are possible.

Dreamers have always shaped our world. Mother Teresa was a dreamer. She experienced what she called a "call within a call"—a profound, lifelong vision to serve the poorest of the poor. From that dream came the Missionaries of Charity, and from that calling flowed compassion to millions.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a dreamer. He dared to imagine a world where his four little children would live in a nation where they were judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. His dream continues to echo because it was rooted in justice, love, and faith.

Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets, was a dreamer. He was an exceptionally kind, gentle and positive person. He had a deep belief in appreciating differences.

And friends, this church is full of dreamers. This church is also a Rainbow Connection. With PFLAG housed here, and with this congregation's commitment to inclusivity—toward all people, all of God's children—this place stands as a sign of unity and hope for a more loving and inclusive society.

In many spiritual and cultural traditions, the rainbow symbolizes a bridge between heaven and earth. It represents promise, covenant, and hope—a connection between the spiritual and the physical.

You might even call it... heaven on earth.

Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But that raises an important question: How are we supposed to know what heaven looks like if we've never been there? Thankfully, Jesus gives us clues—right there in the Lord's Prayer. He teaches us to give thanks for our daily bread. Not tomorrow's bread. Not a lifetime supply of daily bread. And throughout Matthew and Luke, Jesus warns us against stockpiling wealth and clinging to earthly treasures. As the song says: "There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold, and she's buying a stairway to heaven." Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven paints a picture of life's choices—the tension between chasing wealth and discovering true meaning.

Jesus says it even more plainly in Matthew: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Then we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Our sins were forgiven when Jesus died on the cross—but to live heaven on earth, we must learn to forgive one another. There is no hatred in heaven. Forgiveness is simply what they do in heaven.

As we continue to pray “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Because some people’s dreams can become other people’s nightmares. There is no shortage of hell on earth— There’s an abundance of hate, an abundance of greed, an abundance of selfishness. But Jesus calls us to something higher. Jesus calls us to bring heaven to earth. The world desperately needs our love. Our kindness. Our compassion. Our caring. Our generosity. Wayne Dyer once said, “Heaven on Earth is a choice you must make, not a place you must find.”

The Rainbow Connection is that moment when your spiritual purpose—that quiet voice inside—becomes real in the physical world. When the spiritual and the earthly meet, and for a moment, everything feels whole.

Jesus offers us eternal life, as we hear in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

And finally, the Lord’s Prayer concludes: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.” God’s kingdom is everlasting. And every time we choose love over hate, forgiveness over resentment, generosity over fear—we take one step closer to heaven on earth. That, my friends, is the Rainbow Connection.

I was dreaming the other day about how Jesus said His house has “many rooms.” I imagined what it would be like when I got there. In my dream, Jesus met me and said, “We gotta talk. But right now, I’m busy. Go to your room and we’ll talk later.” So, I headed to my room. The halls were huge! I was happy, skipping along and singing, when St. Peter appeared. He whispered, “Hey, Johnny Angel... could you please keep it down?” I said, “Sure. But why?” St. Peter replied, “Shh... this is where the Baptists live, and they think they’re the only ones up here.”

Speaking of St. Peter... There's a story where he asks Jesus to watch the gates for a few minutes while he takes a break. While Jesus is standing there, he sees an old man leading a donkey. The man has carpenter tools. Jesus stops him and asks him to explain why he should be admitted into Heaven. The old man explains: “In English, my name would be Joseph. I lived a modest life making things out of wood. I’m not famous, but everyone has heard of my son. I call him my son, but I was more of a dad to him; he didn't come into the world in the usual way. I sent him out to be among the people, and he was ridiculed, though he tried to be perfect. My biggest reason for wanting to get into Heaven is to be reunited with him.” Jesus is awestruck. He looks into the old man's eyes and whispers, “Dad?” The old man’s face brightens. He looks at Jesus and asks... “Pinocchio?”

On a more serious note... We all try to imagine what Heaven is like. But while we are here, we need to use our dreams to make *this* world a better place. The world often feels tumultuous. A friend of mine posted the song “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen. The chorus goes:

*Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

1 John 2:11 states whoever hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

As Christians, we need to let our light shine into those dark cracks. My dream and hope is that all of us learn to follow the examples of Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jim Henson, and many others, but mostly Jesus Christ.

Mother Teresa showed us love with hands and feet, serving the poorest as if each person were Christ Himself. Martin Luther King Jr. taught us that love is not passive, but courageous—strong enough to confront injustice without losing its soul. Jim Henson reminded us, often through gentleness and humor, that hope, imagination, and connection can soften even the hardest hearts. And above all, Jesus Christ showed us what perfect love looks like: a love that welcomes the outcast, forgives the sinner, heals the broken, and lays down its life for others.

To follow these examples is not about being famous or extraordinary—it's about daily choices: choosing kindness when it would be easier to turn away, choosing compassion when judgment comes naturally, choosing forgiveness when wounds are deep, choosing love even when it costs us something. If more of us lived this way—quietly, faithfully, and consistently—the world would begin to look a little more like the Kingdom Jesus spoke of.

Throughout our lives, we get little messages—"God-incidences"—that give us reassurance about the afterlife. Less than two months ago, my wife Jayne, her sisters, and I traveled to Norfolk to pay tribute to their sister, Jill. Jill was a vibrant lady who loved to sing and dance, and lived life to the fullest, but she had suffered from Alzheimer's for over five years. Near the end, Jill no longer recognized the faces of those who loved her most. But one day, Jill's daughter Ashley, asked her mom what she was pointing at. Jill said that **Jason** was standing over there. He asked her if she wanted to go with him. Jason was our son—Jayne's and mine—who passed away on **November 11, 1999**...Veterans Day. So on **November 11, 2025**—again on Veterans Day—Jill made her journey with Jason into everlasting life. Free of pain. Free of confusion. Free of suffering. It was a moment that stands as a testament to my faith.

What's on the other side of this life? I can only imagine. But I know that when it's my time, everlasting life in Heaven waits for me. So until then, it is well, it is well with my soul. Amen