

UUCA Sermon  
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Summer Minister

### **Are the Rolling Stones Right, or Can We Get Some Satisfaction?**

The fastest growing religion  
In the world today  
May not be Islam.  
Or Christianity.  
According to one source,  
the fastest  
Growing religious trend  
Might just be  
the belief in salvation  
through conspicuous consumption.  
The worship of things.  
The false promise that “having” enough  
Is more important  
than “being” enough.

Radical consumerism,  
As practiced in the developed world  
Dangles the implied promise  
Of transcendence –  
We have a chance to be born again –  
To rise above  
our current state of  
Attractiveness and desirability  
To find more approval and more love,

And, yes, with a wink and a nod  
To the rock and roll band the Rolling Stones,  
We might get some satisfaction.....  
If we only buy the right car,  
Wear the right brand of clothes,  
Drink the most popular beer,  
Or own the latest big screen TV,  
Smart phone, or other electronic toy.

Consumer spending  
Has grown to become  
the single biggest driver  
Of the U.S. economy.  
We are encouraged  
To buy more things  
if we want to create jobs  
and get the economy back on track!

How in the world did we get here?  
In the early part of American history,  
most consumption was spent on necessities.  
Being frugal and saving money  
Were widely held cultural values,  
among the rich and poor alike.

But industrialization  
In the early 1900s changed everything.  
For the first time in human history,  
It was possible to produce more goods  
than people needed.

It was an economic crisis of over-supply.  
American business AND government  
Responded by promoting a  
New set of cultural values --  
For the first time, pleasure and personal deserving  
Were encouraged in place  
Of sacrifice and deferred gratification.  
How our Puritan ancestors  
Must have been spinning  
In their graves.

Advertising  
Helped redefine  
Luxuries as the new necessities.  
In 1880,  
\$30 million dollars a year  
was spent on advertising in the U.S.  
By 1910 – only 30 years later –  
That number jumped  
Twenty-fold  
to \$600 million a year.  
Today, that figure  
Is closer to \$120 billion  
a year in the U.S.,  
And more than \$250 billion  
Spent worldwide.

Now, this consumer paradigm shift  
Wasn't going to work  
Unless the average American  
Had more buying power.  
This led to expanding consumer credit.  
The world's first credit card  
Was introduced in the U.S. in 1950.  
They were marketed intentionally to women,  
granting them increased power  
and cultural permission  
To shop whenever and wherever  
they wanted.

Shopping habits  
Were completely reshaped –  
We began to buy WHAT we wanted,  
WHEN we wanted it.  
Instant personal gratification  
Became the new cultural norm.

Now, some of you  
Might be thinking  
All of this talk about  
crass consumerism  
doesn't really apply to you.  
I am a responsible,  
Careful shopper.

I have never fallen victim  
To the manipulation of  
marketing, merchandising  
and advertising.

Really? It's hard to resist  
The seduction  
To buy more than we really need.

How many of you have shopped  
at a big wholesale club store  
Like Sam's Club, Costco, or BJ's?  
We never walk in  
Intending to buy  
that 12-pack of paper towels,  
Or the four pack of pork tenderloins.  
But hey, it was on sale,  
At a really good price.  
Now, where are you going to store  
that 6-month supply  
of toilet paper and toothpaste?

And today's technology  
Seems to become obsolete  
About 10 minutes after  
We take our new smart phone,  
notepad, television  
Or computer out of the box.  
No matter how many  
Electronic gadgets we own,  
There will always be a  
Smarter phone, a sharper TV  
Or a faster computer  
Available to replace  
What we already have.

And for those of you  
Who were around 20 years ago,  
If someone would have  
Walked up to you  
And said someday  
You were going to  
Spend between 250  
To 10,000 times more  
Than you needed,  
Because you were going to buy  
water in plastic bottles  
Instead of drinking  
Perfectly good, safe tap water  
Coming right out of your kitchen sink?  
Would you have believed them?

TAKE OUT WATER BOTTLE AND UNSCREW CAP

You probably would have told them  
They were nuts.  
You'd never do anything like that,  
Right?

TAKE A SWING FROM THE BOTTLE, RECAP  
AND SET BACK DOWN

Now, I'm not telling you  
Anything about the evils of consumerism  
That you haven't heard before.  
But it is important for us  
To revisit this issue from time to time --  
To take a fresh look at  
The cultural pressures surrounding us  
And to recognize consumerism  
For the spiritual dilemma it truly is.  
For the disconnection  
It creates in our lives.

Because consumerism disconnects us  
From what is most important.  
Study after study confirms that  
No one can BUY happiness.  
While we may feel a short-term  
Sense of satisfaction and wellbeing  
Following a new purchase,  
That satisfaction never lasts long.  
People report  
That true happiness is found  
In our relationships with others,  
And from our life experiences,  
Not from our belongings.

Consumerism also disconnects us  
from the human cost  
Of the products we buy.  
Who truly pays  
For the lifestyle I live?

I wore this top this morning  
To make a point.  
I bought it several years ago  
At Sam's Club  
For only \$12.99.  
Now, for those of you  
Who don't shop for women's clothing,  
That's a bargain --  
Almost what we'd call "a steal."



The label says  
It was made in Vietnam.  
But, I confess,  
Before the factory collapse  
in Bangladesh three months ago,  
that killed more than 1100 people,  
I never gave it a second thought  
Where my clothes came from.

I didn't think about  
That young Vietnamese girl –  
because in the garment industry,  
it was most likely  
a teen-aged girl or young woman --  
who bent over a machine  
16 to 17 hours a day,  
seven days a week,  
With no safety gear  
To protect her,  
Earning maybe around 17 cents an hour.

She is invisible to me  
In this global economy,  
I have to really strain  
To see her in my mind's eye.  
To remember she has no health benefits,  
No workers rights.  
If she complains, or gets sick,  
She gets fired.  
Maybe she gets one day off  
Every other month or so,  
When she gets to go home  
to her village  
and see her family.

She lives the life she lives,  
So I can live the life I live –  
So I can buy this top for “a steal.”

Now, perhaps  
This story has a flip side –  
this job might be  
One of the best things  
That has ever happened to her.  
Perhaps she makes more money  
Than she ever dreamed possible.  
This job might make her  
One of the wealthiest  
People in the village.  
Maybe this job  
Is helping her send  
younger brothers and sisters  
to school.

Maybe.....  
The truth is, I don't know.  
And I will never know.  
But as a person of faith,  
It is important  
That I begin to see her,  
Even if only in my mind's eye  
To start.

Faith calls me  
To recognize  
That If I wasn't willing  
To work under the same conditions  
she does,  
How can I allow another member  
Of my human family  
To work like that?  
My faith calls me to ask:  
How am I complicit in this scenario?  
And what can I do to help her?

Awareness is the first step  
In helping to bring about change.  
I encourage you to start reading labels –  
Become more aware of where  
Your clothing, your tools,  
Your appliances  
and electronic toys are made.  
And to be mindful  
Of the manufacturing conditions  
Half a world away.

Understand, I am NOT advocating  
that we boycott goods made overseas  
to buy only American made products.  
I'm not sure that is practical,  
Nor do I not want  
To take away  
That young Vietnamese girl's right  
To make a living,  
To support a family,  
To secure her own economic future.

Instead, I believe we are called  
To hold big international brands  
Accountable for improving working conditions  
In the factories they use overseas.  
We can speak out –  
Let these branded companies know  
That we would be willing to pay more  
For the clothing we buy,  
To create safe working conditions  
And to provide benefits  
And security for international workers.  
We can speak out to our politicians  
To support trade agreements  
That will help to shrink the huge gap  
Between the “haves” and the “have nots”  
Around the world.

We are also encouraged  
To buy fair trade goods.  
This church sells fair trade  
chocolate and coffee.  
When we buy these items,  
local farmers in developing nations,  
receive higher market rates  
for the coffee or cocoa beans they grow.

(PAUSE)

Consumerism also disconnects us  
from reality – from placing our own lives  
Into truly proper perspective.  
We often forget  
That in truth,  
Most of us live lives  
of tremendous luxury and privilege.

It is difficult for me to complain  
About all the hassles  
I am having  
getting my big screen TV  
and entertainment center set up  
When I am reminded  
by a recent United Nations report  
that 1.6 billion people –  
One quarter of all humanity –  
Lives without electricity.

Or to be reminded  
that 80% of the world  
Lives on less than  
\$10 dollars a day.  
Less than the equivalent  
Of ten US dollars.  
How many Americans  
Think nothing of spending  
\$10 a day  
just on mocha lattah  
La dee dah dah drinks  
At the corner coffee shop?

When we recognize our privilege,  
We recognize we have a choice.  
We are reminded  
that wanting is different than needing.  
And while it is OK to treat ourselves  
To the things we want,  
We are called to do so  
Being mindful of what we can truly afford –  
And of the human cost  
Of the buying decisions we make.

And, finally, consumerism disconnects us  
From the deepest truth  
about ourselves –  
we have inherent worth and dignity.  
Each of us is unique, precious  
And valuable.

We are NOT  
Who advertising says we are.  
We are NOT less than,  
We are NOT incomplete.  
There is nothing wrong  
About who we are,  
And we are NOT healed  
by buying newer, better things.

We have a choice –  
We can turn the TV off  
From time to time  
to stop the flow  
Of this toxic non-sense.

Especially when you consider this:  
The American Medical Association  
Estimates that our children  
Spend 6,000 more hours  
In front of a TV each year  
Than they spend in school.  
The American child  
Watches between  
25,000 to 40,000  
television commercials per year.  
That equals  
25,000 to 40,000  
different assaults to a child's  
growing sense of well-being  
and to their inherent and precious self-worth.  
Make no mistake,  
Advertisers are training  
Our children  
To believe they are less-than  
So they will become the non-stop  
shoppers of tomorrow.



But here is the truth  
About our sacred selves:  
We are beings of value and worth.  
That worth  
Does not depend on our skin color,  
Our gender,  
Our sexual orientation,  
Or the country of our national origin.  
It does not depend  
On how much money  
We have in the bank,  
And it certainly  
Does NOT depend  
On the things we own –  
The clothes we wear,  
The cars we drive,  
The sodas we drink  
Or the neighborhoods  
We live in.

When we feel an overwhelming urge  
to buy something we don't really need,  
we have the choice to ask ourselves:  
Do I really want this?  
Can I really afford it?  
And why am I buying this right now?  
Is there an emotional reason?  
Am I bored?  
Am I trying to lift myself out of a funk?  
Am I subconsciously buying into  
The status of this brand?  
Am I trying to feel better  
About who I am  
Through having  
Instead of being?

What DO we really hunger for?  
Things? Or are we hungering  
For love, for acceptance?  
For a better sense of self?  
I encourage you to  
Push back against  
Consumerism's false promises  
of a better self –  
and remember the REAL promise  
of your faith.  
That you already ARE  
That imagined better self.  
You are a person  
Of precious worth and dignity  
Beyond all measure.  
And you are lovable  
And loved beyond all measure.

Come, come whoever you are  
And take a break from  
The toxic influence of our  
Consumer culture.  
Come here, to be reminded  
That we are truly blessed.  
Come here to celebrate,  
Nurture and grow  
Who you are  
At your deepest levels of being --  
Because it there,  
At our deepest core,  
That we come to know we ARE enough,  
It is there, that we can finally  
get some satisfaction.  
A hey hey hey  
and  
Amen, and blessed be.