

Rich in Good Deeds

Sunday, September 25, 2016

Andrew Wallace, guest preacher

Epistle: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

Text: “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.” —1 Timothy 6:18

Today we kick off our stewardship season. Catherine and Bruce have given us a thoughtful and heartening message of ...

Members and friends will receive a letter that asks each of us to prayerfully consider our giving to the missions of this church: what time we will plan to give and where we plan to pass it; which gift of the spirit we will plan to use or develop; and yes, how we will plan to spend our money and how much of it to offer.

Over the years, I’ve heard many Stewardship sermons. How difficult a task it must be for a pastor to preach a sermon on Stewardship. There must be so many things to consider: The task of challenging your congregation to give of themselves; their time, talents, and treasure. How strong to come on; to know people are giving and ask for it to continue or challenge them to do or give even more. To talk about money openly is something we don’t do well in this culture. And what about those friends who are new to the church OR someone who is visiting for the first time - will they think our church is all about money? It’s not!

I remember thinking many times over the years, “Boy, am I glad I’ll never have to preach a Stewardship sermon.”

Last week we heard Paul’s advice and instructions on worship and prayer. We, like Timothy, are to pray for the whole world. We saw that God, our savior, wants all people to be saved. So when we pray, we are to pray for all people.

This is the second week in a series of message themes called Children of Faith. We are exploring the letters of Paul to Timothy. 1 Timothy contains practical advice for the young pastor Timothy, whom the elder Paul considered a child in faith. In the first chapter of the book, Paul refers to Timothy as, “my son.” Paul was reaching the end of his long ministry and was passing down his own faith and directions to his child in the faith. What a beautiful image of mentorship we have here as Paul’s letter also serves as an example or a template of church leadership for us today, for we are also children in the faith.

Today, we move into a part of the letter centering on godliness and a warning about materialism, instructions and encouragement on avoiding that temptations created by money through living a generous life, and finding a good reason to work at it every day.

It's not just in our reading of 1 Timothy that we are directed to focus on our use of money. The Lectionary passages for today direct our attention to examples of the use of riches and how it effects our own lives. In our Wednesday evening Bible studies, Pastor Wayne is leading an exploration of the weekly lectionary passages that are used in Sunday morning Worship to better understand how the texts relate to one another. A common theme emerges when we take a look at each of the scriptures.

The Old Testament Lesson for today is from Jeremiah 32.

32 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. ²The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.

Jeremiah the prophet was prisoner under King Zedekiah. Babylon had laid siege to Jerusalem, and was about to take God's people captive. Jeremiah was speaking the truth. There was no avoiding it, no resistance would be successful. His warnings and prophesying annoyed King Zedekiah so much that he imprisoned Jeremiah. And what does Jeremiah do? He reveals that God has told him to purchase a plot of land, which he does. What?! God had revealed to Jeremiah that the people would be taken captive in Babylon and he bought land in Judah?

This was God's way of telling Judah that there would be a return to the promised land.

The Psalm for today served as our opening sentences and offered many a familiar passage:

⁹*If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
¹⁰no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
¹²they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*

The Psalmist finds his refuge ‘under the shadow of the Almighty.’ God is a refuge, a fortress, a shield, an answer to fear. Despite all of what surrounds us, we are assured that the person who calls on the name of the Lord will be answered. God’s response includes deliverance and salvation.

In the Gospel lesson from Luke we heard earlier, Jesus challenges us with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Scholars agree that this is not the Lazarus the Jesus knew and raised from the dead.

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Why did Lazarus long to eat what fell from the rich man’s table? Why did the dogs lick his sores? We are led to infer that the rich man did nothing to help Lazarus to take care of the man at his doorstep every day. Martin Luther taught that this story was a parable and not to be taken literally. That our focus is not in the reversal of fortune of the main characters but in the lesson of concern for the poor and that in this case Abraham represents the Word of God. And in that Word, brought to us by Moses and the Prophets, we find truth, and life.

So then, we return to 1 Timothy and rather than approach it with the thought that it is a passage just about money, let’s consider that it may also be a lesson in **trust**.

Paul reminds Timothy that we can easily become trapped by a desire to become rich. The want of more can cause us to become discontent with all that we do have. We can become so focused on acquiring wealth and possessions that we might become miserable and may even cause us to wander from our faith. Then as now getting rich can become an obsession. As a man of God, Paul tells Timothy to ‘flee from all this.’ He explains that, ‘the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.’

Let’s be clear about this warning. Money is not a root of evil, the love of money is a root. There is a difference. This isn’t a warning to the rich, rather it is addressed to those who want to get rich or richer. Verse 9 teaches that the temptation is a trap that can plunge us into ruin and destruction. Pastor Michael Roberts points out that we can give money power and influence over ourselves and that influence can be harmful. He relates that he sometimes hears “people reflecting on their lives who claim that their own greed got them where they are—harming a relationship, stressing their lives, making them anxious. That too many times people who in the pursuit of pleasure or acquiring more things pulled away

from the faith. Verse 10 seems as strikingly relevant today as it was in the first century: "*Some people, eager for money, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*" Greed and a lust for more rather than contentment. St. Augustine once said "by lusting after something more, we are made something less."

By now it is pretty clear that, even in the church, we need to be cautious about the love of money and riches and the craving for more. So we know what to avoid, but what do we follow?

Paul encourages us to 'pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.' Like Timothy, we have made the 'good confession in the presence of many witnesses.' When we confess faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we recognize that God gives life to everything. God has given us all that we need. 'If we have food and clothing, we will be content.' In order to be content we sure do need to trust, don't we? Is true wealth the gift to trust in God?

Did you know, have you noticed in Worship that it is not only the Lectionary readings that connect through common subjects? That we strive to make a thematic connection in the Opening Sentences, the prayers, the hymns and music? Each element of worship helps us to approach what God would reveal to us as we gather for corporate worship.

8am – *'Tis So Sweet to Trust* in Jesus, the cello and piano duet offered as special music today reminds us of the joy in trusting Jesus.

v. 3. Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
just from sin and self to cease;
just from Jesus simply taking
life and rest, and joy and peace.

10 am – The Choir's anthem today reminds us that God 'raises us up,' lifts our spirits, prepares us for living a life rich in good deeds so that we may 'stand on mountains, walk on stormy seas, so that we become strong and be more than we could be' without Jesus. But not for our own sake alone. We know that through listening to Scripture, it is for the sake of others that we are blessed.

It is here that Paul moves us from the warnings about the love of money to what trusting in the promises of God can do in this world and in our individual lives. We who are so richly blessed are commanded not to be arrogant, to not put our hope in wealth, but to put our hope in God. The rich man in the parable was an arrogant man. He clothed himself in purple and linen and lived in luxury every day. He missed the opportunity to do good with the riches he had been given. We can effectively manage our riches to take care of ourselves and others. How do we put that lesson to use?

If you had the opportunity to read your September Scribe, our church newsletter, we heard a beautifully expressed word of encouragement about Stewardship. Bruce and Catherine, our Stewardship Co-Chairs this year wrote to us...to this body of Children of Faith that:

“Stewardship is about more than tithing or pledging. Stewardship is sharing the gifts and talents that God has given us to help the Church, to glorify God, and help other people. Through Stewardship, we can be transformed, changing how we relate to Jesus and to the people around us. Stewardship lets the Church sow the seeds of God’s love so that the Church can put God’s love into action.”

Part of Stewardship is giving from our material resources. We are commanded to be generous and willing to share. There are good reasons to do this. First we give to meet people’s needs. We give to this church to meet the spiritual needs of people. We support worship by providing the space and all you see in it. We support Christian education through our facilities and materials. We support mission through meeting the needs of so many here in this community and in places around the nation and world.

We also give of our time and talents. We give out of gratitude. It is here also that we have opportunity to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Just three weeks ago we were reminded of what it means to be rich in good deeds and willing to share. Mother Teresa was canonized by Pope Francis. Saint Teresa of Calcutta dedicated her life to caring for those whom no one else cared whether they lived or died. She reached out to the very least and last. Her work centered on providing for the material needs of the people she encountered AND she also dedicated her life to teaching others about Jesus Christ.

But we don’t have to look far for examples. People of this church are very generous and willing to share. We share to meet the spiritual needs of the people. Every day people are here heeding Paul’s message to do good. Our spiritual needs are met here through the giving of time and talents. Bulletins are folded, greeters and ushers welcome us, people prepare Bible studies and Sunday school lessons and offer testimony to their faith in Worship.

And individuals come together to make a joyful noise to the Lord. I am fortunate enough to get to work with all of the members of our adult, youth, and children’s choirs. And let me tell you, they all give with a glad and joyful heart. They have taken to heart Paul’s command to be rich in good deeds. They give hours of their time each week to prepare music to meet our spiritual needs.

Cheryl Ferris dropped a newspaper article in my box this week about the health benefits of singing in a choir. Apparently scientists have conducted a study of choir members and they have biological proof that singing in the choir can give the immune system a boost, reduce the hormones associated with stress, and be a factor in improving the outlook for people struggling with anxiety and depression. Now naturally I wondered how scientists came to these conclusions. The choir members provided samples of their saliva before and after rehearsals. We won't try to duplicate the data here!

We each have time and talent to share. We don't give for the benefit to our physical health. We give because we are called to give. We give because our hope is not in material wealth. We heed Paul's charge to us to do good, be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

As Christians we give because we are grateful for God's greatest gift. We have the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave freely without reserve. There was no holding back. We look to Jesus to lead and guide us as we are rich in good deeds. In this way we will lay up treasure as a firm foundation and take hold of life that is truly life.