



“Together we do more: Wrestling with Ministry”

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, September 25, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146;
1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Anglican Bishop and biblical scholar N.T. Wright tells the story about a very rich woman who passed away and at the funeral people came up to the priest and asked curiously, “Well how much did she leave?” The priest looked at the people and said “Everything.” That is the circle of life, isn't it?

A number of years ago I read that somebody had a favorite car, it was one of these cars from the 1950's. They had spent hours and hours fixing up this car, and at the end of his life he bought six cemetery plots so that he could be buried in his car. Literally in the car. Somehow I guess he thought he could take it with him, but brothers and sisters, incase you weren't sure, I am here to tell you; you enter the world naked and that's pretty much how you go out as well. And everything else in between is that journey of life and just in case you think it's just you, I am here to tell you Jesus the Savior had that same kind of life, that journey, that faithful journey. Of course we know that he also conquered death and rose from the dead.

We like to think that somehow we are going to be able to keep it all. And we live in a world that is all about trying to get even more. And in Paul's letter to Timothy he is counseling this young pastor to teach contentment in place of materialism. Now Paul is addressing Timothy while he is ministering in Ephesus. Ephesus was a thriving city, it was a great metropolitan city, a lot of commerce. Paul uses the word *contentment*, a term often used by the Greek philosophers that they would have understood as “self-sufficiency.” But Paul really isn't talking here about self-sufficiency, instead he's talking about “Christ-sufficiency.” To be content is to be content in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To be content with what God has given to us and understanding that the greatest asset that we have is not our money and possessions, but instead our faith.

Now, for many of us we understand that we shouldn't steal...that act of taking something from another person, we understand that. But the other commandment, commandment that you shall not covet, that one's a little bit more difficult. Coveting is desiring things so that they get in the way of our relationships we have with brothers and sisters in Christ. That actually plays more on our hearts and our thoughts than the actual act of stealing.

And that's why the apostles, including Paul, recognized that the love of money was the root of all evil. It just festers there as we work in pursuit of more. And it leads to all sorts of self servicing.

In the gospel Jesus tells the story about a rich man just living his life. Just living his life and accumulating more and more and not noticing the “least of these” who were right around the corner. Clearly Jesus doesn't want us to be like the rich man in the gospel. But it is unfortunate

too much of the desire for accumulation makes it all about us and our desires. But Jesus wants to caution us that greed will ultimately bring about pain and grief. It will lead to despair and a defeated spirit.

When I served congregations, especially a congregation in Westchester County, north of New York City, I saw the negative impact of affluence. You would look at the houses and you would think how great they have everything that they could possibly need or want, and yet they weren't happy. Too often they were living in broken relationships with spouses and children. Too often they were worried about what was going to be next. How do we defeat that? How do we see that spirit as Christians?

I think the Bible is really clear. Gratitude and generosity are the antidote for greed and coveting. And our involvement in Christ's ministry, utilizing our time, our talents, and our treasures to benefit others increases not our personal gain but spiritual gain. When we realize that we are content with what we have and "we can do everything through Him who gives us strength," then we can defeat the powers of this world.

And so Paul lifts up Christian virtues for us when he is writing to Timothy. These are the things that you and I should seek to pursue; Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Endurance, Gentleness. Notice how different these Christian virtues are from the world's virtues, because these virtues are given to us by God himself, and it's not based on our worth or our status or our wealth. They come to us as a free gift. And living in these virtues Paul uses these amazing verbs, did you catch that, these forceful verbs. These are the kind of verbs that you use when you're talking about athletics; Flee, Pursue, Fight, Take hold. Paul and Jesus both recognized that living in this world today is a fight, but it's a good fight. And like Olympic champions it will take for you and for me diligence and discipline, growth and development, training and sacrifice. So how's your training going, brothers and sisters?

The Christianity that we profess is not a passive religion. It's an active religion. As the church we seek to get things done. It's okay to come into church for worship and sit down for an hour, well, an hour and five minutes. But then after that, never forget one of the most important things that we say at the end of the service is "Go in peace and . . . serve the Lord." That's another way of saying it's nice that we're here to worship, but it's time for all of us to get out and to be the body of Christ in the world today. And so I invite you to participate in the many ministries that we have here, the many social ministries, the many missions, the different opportunities that we have to share the love of Jesus Christ. We are each one of us called to share money, time, and talents and ministry with a world that is hurting. To use our resources for the building up of God's kingdom and so be generous to God with your money and your time. "Take hold of eternal life" as Paul says, for God has put a lot of responsibility on us. But we don't go alone, our hope is in God, the king of kings, and the Lord of Lords is with us.

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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