

“A LIFE GIVING PRACTICE”

Psalm 91 1 Timothy 6:6-19 November 17, 2019

In recent years we've heard a lot about the "1 percent." These are the richest of the rich. Recent research shows that by the year 2016 the 1 percent will own more than half of the world's assets. This growing inequality of wealth is extremely troubling and threatens to cause global turmoil in the future.

So in today's text, when Paul refers to "those who in the present age are rich," is he speaking about the 1 percent? Yes and no. The 1 percent would certainly be included in this statement. However, compared to conditions in the ancient world and compared to today's global financial landscape, any American in the middle class is clearly "rich." So when Paul talks about the rich, he's talking about most American clergy and most members of U.S. congregations. And Paul's words to us are clear: God expects us to be generous with our financial assets.

Unfortunately, most American Christians are not particularly generous. In the book titled *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money* the authors come to the sad conclusion that most American Christians are "remarkably ungenerous." For example, 20 percent of U.S. Christians give absolutely nothing to charity. They spend every dime on themselves. Of the 80 percent who do give to charity, most give very little, usually only 1-2 percent of their total income. In the author's opinion, the primary reason Christians give so little is because we live in a radically consumerist culture, one intentionally designed to create permanent discontentment so that we'll buy more and more stuff. In short, we spend so much money on ourselves that we have little left for God and for people in need.

In this kind of hyperconsumerist context, the words of 1 Timothy are especially relevant. In the text, Paul says: "There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

By resisting greed, living simply, and being content with the basics, Christian disciples can afford to be generous. When we do practice generosity, our text tells us we will store up true "treasure" that leads to "life that really is life" (1 Timothy 6:19). So, in the end, generosity is not a burden but a blessing. Generosity is a life-giving practice. As Proverbs 11:25 puts it, "A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water."

What are the true riches? The true riches are those eternal riches, rich in the things of the Spirit. Jeremiah said, "Thus said the Lord, Let not the wise glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty glory in his might, let not the rich glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. Godliness with contentment is great riches. Having Godly characteristics such as love, joy, peace, patience, self control, kindness, mercy and grace are the fruits of the Spirit generously given to us. We are truly rich in many ways and blessed. Do you ever pass by some very expensive McMansions in Cheyenne or Denver and think of how much they have to pay in taxes or upkeep and feel thankful that we don't have to live in such fancy homes? I do feel the need to insert here how thankful George and I are for Mildred McFann's estate gift that not only built our

parsonage but also left enough to start the foundation to maintain it. The plaque on the outside by the front door states that it was built in 1988 “In loving memory of her devotion to God and Her Church.” March 7, 1897-March 7, 1987. A very generous member of the church whose generosity continues to bless us. Your generosity as this Family of Faith over the years has been awesome and faithful!

We appreciate each of you as you contribute out of God’s blessings for you.

Contentment is a rich asset. Paul said that he had learned that in whatever state he was in to be content. Some of the richest people are also some of the most discontented. “A man who retired right after his wife died as he was being interviewed at his retirement dinner, said, ‘I decided to retire when I had enough to live on. My wife said that I should wait until we had enough to be content. I received mine a long time ago. We never were able to obtain hers.’”

Then there’s the story of a lady who loved her pink Cadillac so much that her dying wish was to be buried sitting on the seat of her Cadillac. As the crane was letting the Cadillac into the ground, a workman was heard to remark, “Now that’s real living.”

“For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain, we will take nothing out.” You have probably heard this old saying in many different ways:

You have never seen a hearse pulling a U Haul trailer. Job said, “Naked I came into this world, naked I will go out.”

“A wealthy farmer died, and someone asked his son, “How much did your old man leave?” “Everything” was the answer.

You can’t take it with you, but you can send it ahead. You can have treasures in heaven. Jesus encourage that. The true riches are eternal. Godliness and contentment are great riches here, and they will be yours forever.

As are in the midst of our “Heart-Centered Discipleship” campaign, we have been emphasizing this as a form of ministry. “Vision and mission are so central to the life of God’s people that without vision we perish and without mission we lose our way.

In Henri Nouwen’s book he writes: *Fundraising is proclaiming what we believe in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate with us in our vision and mission. Fundraising is precisely the opposite of begging. When we seek to raise funds we are not saying, “Please, could you help us out because lately it’s been hard.” Rather, we are declaring, “We have a vision that is amazing and exciting. We are inviting you to invest yourself through the resources that God has given you—your energy, your prayers, and your money—in this work to which God has called us.” Our invitation is clear and confident because we trust that our vision and mission are like “trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither” (Ps. 1:3).*

Nouwen goes on to explain that fundraising is also always a call to conversion. This call comes to both those who seek funds and those who have funds. Whether we are asking for money or giving money we are drawn together by God, who is about to do a new thing through our collaboration (Isaiah 43:19).

To be converted means to experience a deep shift in how we see and think and act.

To be converted is to be clothed in our right mind, to come to see ourselves the way the younger son did when he was starving far from his true home (Luke 15:14-20). It is a shift of attention in which we set our mind on divine things (Matthew 16:23). “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). Fundraising as a ministry involves a real conversion.

In fundraising as ministry, we are inviting you into a new way of relating to your resources. By giving you a spiritual vision, we want you to experience that you will in fact benefit by making your resources available to us.

We truly believe that if your gift is good only for us who receive, it is not fundraising in the spiritual sense. Fundraising then from the point of view of the

gospel says to us: “I will take your money and invest it in this vision only if it is good for your spiritual journey, only if it is good for your spiritual health.” In other words, we are calling you to an experience of conversion: “You won’t become poorer, you will become richer by giving.” We can confidently declare with the Apostle Paul: 1).“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity” (2 Cor. 9:1)

When those with money and those who need money share a mission, we see a central sign of new life in the Spirit of Christ. We belong together in our work because Jesus brought us together, and our fruitfulness depends on staying connected with him. Jesus tells us: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). With him, we can do anything because we know that God surrounds us with an abundance of blessings. Therefore, those who need money and those who can give money meet on the common ground of God’s love. “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8). When this happens, we can indeed say with Paul, “There is a new creation!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Where there is a new creation in Christ, there the kingdom of God is made manifest to the world.

Please pray with me. Loving God, please grant us this confident, joyful, and hope-filled expression of ministry as we consider our commitment to Your vision and future for this church. In ministering to each other, each from the riches that we possess, may we work together for the full coming of God’s kingdom. Amen.