

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, Year C  
September 25, 2022  
St. Charles Ave Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Sarah Chancellor-Watson  
1 Timothy 6:6-19

“Take Hold”

Every year as the calendar pages turn, children return to school, and the temperatures start to drop – and they will eventually drop around here – I am reminded of some of my favorite memories – the four years I spent in college at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK. Like many college students my fall social calendar was dominated by football games, tailgates, and watch parties. My parents would often come up for the games and feed me and all my friends. College for me, like most young people, was a transformative time as I dealt with the very important developmental questions of what I am meant to do and who am I supposed to be in this world. Thankfully, my close relationship with my parents and other incredible mentors and adults in my life, were very helpful to me in this period of deep discernment. Like the good parents that they are they wanted me to be happy in whatever I was doing, they wanted me to excel using the gifts and the talents that I have, and they wanted me to make at least some money doing it, supporting myself and gaining that independence that every young person must eventually. Paul in today’s passage gives similar advice to a young leader in the church – Timothy. In his letter Paul articulates his view on ministry, built from his years and experience in faith and in leadership, of how we are meant to relate to one another and to the material world.

Paul tells Timothy that there is much to be gained in a life marked by godliness. And godliness is the living of life according to the will of God. Last week we explored another passage in this letter to Timothy. Where Paul speaks of the will of God – “who desires everyone

to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” God reveals this truth through the Law, the Word spoken through the prophets and other parts of scripture, and the Incarnation of the Word and ultimate fulfillment of the Law in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul is illuminating some truth here when it comes to what is truly valuable in life and what does success look like in a godly life. The crux of his argument against the temptations related to the love of money I think is found in the original 10 laws, the 10 commandments, specifically the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment regarding idolatry.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol...” An idol is quite simply anything that we desire, trust, love – over and above God. Now I have to admit this is not a commandment that I think about too often and when I do read or study it in scripture my mind tends to conjure up images of clay figures displayed in the dwellings of ancient near eastern cultures representing the household gods to which one prayed to for rain, a bountiful harvest, a safe journey, healthy children, a favorable outcome in battle. It all feels a little too removed to have anything to do with me, with us, today. However, this commandment is about more than a God who cannot be contained by clay, stone, or metal. It’s about setting our priorities right and putting our ultimate trust in no one, no thing, no institution but God. And the creation of an idol is so dangerously subtle<sup>1</sup> and often happens without us even realizing it as a love or a passion or even good intentions can turn into an obsession, into the object of our complete desire.

By this time in the church’s history Paul had already seen how the influence of money and power had corrupted some segments of the community and its leaders. There were those who

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<sup>1</sup> Matthews, William P. “Matt”, “Homiletical Perspective, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, Proper 21,” *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4*. Pg. 111.

saw that sharing the Good News could actually be quite lucrative – if done right. And frankly it's all too easy for us to think of modern examples of churches and leaders corrupted by the temptations of wealth, from the scandalous fall of the evangelical empire built by Jim and Tammy Faye Baker to Kenneth Copeland insisting that his small fleet of private jets was necessary because you can't "talk to God" while flying commercial<sup>2</sup>. And while we can pick on the disgraced televangelists and mega churches all day long, financial malpractice happens in churches big and small, mainline protestant, Catholic, charismatic evangelical alike, with all too common frequency. Paul understood how insidious the sin of idolatry can be, he was worried about this fledgling Christian community and all the ways that people can be led astray and so he warns Timothy about just how tempting it can be to go down that path.

When I really sat down to think about money and wanting money and even loving money and just what was so wrong about that in first place, I realized that perhaps the biggest temptation with money is that there is just never enough – there is always more to strive for, more to be gained! In our culture there is a strong current where we are taught to never be satisfied, to never be content, that any success or amount of wealth is never enough. But that is precisely what Paul is calling Timothy to in a life of contentment, of being happy with enough. The Greek word that is used here for contentment is *autarkeias* which can also be translated as "self-sufficiency," Which I think also helps us to understand that contentment is not about just accepting tough or oppressive circumstance or reality, like poverty, that don't allow for human

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<sup>2</sup> Brice-Saddler, Michael. "A wealthy televangelist explains his fleet of private jets: 'It's a biblical thing'," *The Washington Post*. June 3, 2019.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/06/04/wealthy-televangelist-explains-his-fleet-private-jets-its-biblical-thing/>

flourishing. It's not about saying to those who have little or nothing "be happy with nothing." And I think it's very important to say that Paul's words were also not about demonizing or shaming those who are wealthy. One of the great misinterpretations of this passage is to shorten the phrase "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" to "money is the root of all evil." There is a clear distinction between money and the love of money. Money in the right hands is a powerful tool that can and does do so much good in this world. Money can build schools, cure diseases, pay a salary, put food on a table, it can give peace of mind, protect and preserve the natural world, and break cycles of generational poverty. It all comes down to where and with whom do we place our trust? In the volatility and uncertainty of monetary riches or in the riches of God? Money like idols made of clay and stone doesn't last, they are not the things of eternal life, what instead endures are our good works, and the investments we make in relationships and in community.

Paul leave Timothy with the same words of encouragement that he began his letter with "fight the good fight of faith." A turn of phrase that is better understand as something more like athletic trial and less a boxing match or a battle. When I was in my first year at seminary I got talked into running a half marathon with some of my classmates. I was never going to set any world records at my leisurely 12 minute mile pace and before this race the longest distance I had ever run was a 10k – about 6 miles. A half marathon is over twice that at a little over 13 miles. With this daunting race in mind I laid out a training schedule that let me gradually build up my runs so I could endure the grueling challenge of a 13 mile run on race day. Sticking to that training schedule was not easy. There were many days where I didn't want to get out there and run or days when I would let other distractions take hold of my day. But ultimately what

motivated me most was the encouragement I received from my friends who were running this race with me and others who knew that I was taking on this challenge. Now I don't remember my finish time, and I have not run another half marathon since, but I do remember feeling strong and confident in what I could achieve.

Faith is like training for a marathon, it takes dedication and drive to everyday be able to face the temptations of this world. We don't run this race alone, strength and encouragement as well as accountability are found in the community of believers, as each of us discover strength and contentment in the treasures of the Kingdom of God – where wealth is not measured by one's stock portfolio, but instead by one's generosity and good works. Our everyday practice of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness, is how we grab hold of the life that is really life, eternal life here and now as the kingdom of God which draws near.