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 November 13, 2022
 Stewardship Sunday

The Joy of Generosity
1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

Today our reading is from the first of three Pastoral letters from Paul. It's a letter to a young pastor protégé and frequent traveling companion, Timothy. Paul writes to encourage him in ministry, and uphold the character of the body of Christ, the church.

We pick up at the end of this letter, when Paul is reminding Timothy of what's really important in life, especially when it comes to what we have.

I'm going to start by reading chapter 6, verses 6-10, then 17-19.

Hear the Word of the Lord for you today:

*⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with **contentment**; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that^[d] we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰For 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.*

*⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with **everything for our enjoyment**. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that **really is life**.*

So who bought a **lottery ticket** recently—when it was a 2 billion prize?

And what did you **dream about** if you were to win that lottery?

What would you do with it?

Can you even **imagine** being that rich?

Do you know anyone who has **way more money** than they need?

I know some who spend money in ways that boggle my mind.

I can't even imagine.

What would it FEEL like to be rich?

Well, what if I told you that ***you ALREADY are?***

As Americans, even those who have less are rich compared to the rest of the world.

Go to the website ***globalrichlist.com*** this week, and you can find out exactly where you rank in the world according to wealth. You can also see what a difference giving a percentage of your income can make in this world. For instance, if you have a household income of \$100,000 a year, you are in the richest 1.9% of the global population! And if you gave 10% of that to charity you could do things like buy thousands of mosquito nets, thousands of doses of needed medicine, you could literally save lives!

If you have that income, you are more than 16 times the income of the average person in our world.

Because most of the world lives on less than a dollar a day!

It's really humbling to look at their statistics.

Of course, Americans are also ***notorious for our debt.***

So the riches we have are not always enough to catch up to our expenses, much less emergencies or disasters that can wipe us out financially.

Many people are just ***a paycheck away*** from losing homes, or cars.

Many do not have savings, or retirement for the future.

Which brings us to this conversation Paul is having with Timothy.

He knows Timothy is not wealthy as a pastor,

but he knows that has a church in Ephesus, full of people with means.

And that wealth---a term that most of us shy away from when talking about ourselves---that ***wealth comes with temptations.***

The temptation is ***to care too much*** about the money.

Too much about the stuff.

It's kind of like how Jesus told that rich young ruler to sell all and follow Him, because he knew how his heart was tied to his wealth,

Paul tells Timothy that those who are rich

(meaning most people hearing this letter)

should be *careful with their hearts*—and realize the *temptation to love money*. And that *LOVE of money* is the *root of all kinds of evil, and suffering, and pain*.

Notice that Paul does NOT, and Jesus does not, say that *money itself* is the root of evil.

It is the *LOVE of it* that causes so much harm and destruction:

¹⁰ *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.*

I think we could all agree that *loving money causes problems*.

Even winning the lottery might not be worth it, when you think about what temptations, trials, and decisions would come with that wealth, and what kind of crazy ‘friends’ and relatives would come crawling out of the woodwork to find you!

There’s a reason that many lottery winners *go bankrupt* within a few years!

But most of us don't have a ton of money to worry about, and most of us don't ‘love’ money, so *what do Paul’s words to Timothy have to say to US?*

What if the question is not do you love money?

Most of us would say NO.

What if the question is, what do you love *ABOUT your money?*

Today I was talking to the kids about *shoes* I remember buying, and I don't even wear anymore—

but I thought they would be great, so I bought them.

I was excited about those shoes at the time—and now I regret the money spent on things like that -- usually just collecting dust today!

Got anything like that in your house?

Don’t we all have those temptations—to *spend where it’s not needed?*

To *use money unwisely?*

Don't we all face the temptation to *go into debt* when we could choose to wait, or deny the urge to buy, or just realize it is not a need?

It’s so easy—way too easy today—to *click and buy, or swipe and buy, or pull out your credit card to get* things today.

I know I can get caught up in buying a present for someone online, and suddenly I see things I might need...and before you know it the *cart has been clicked* and I'm out money that I didn't need to spend!

Kind of like when I joke with someone *at the grocery store*, about how I just come in here for *three items* on a list.... and somehow I'm leaving with \$100 worth of food!

We all know these temptations of money.
And we all know how *easy it is to think that money can do more than it can really do*.

We feel *sad*, so we shop.

We feel *disappointed*, so we buy something.

We feel *tired of the old model*, so we get a new one.

When we could just stop.

So, what helps us do that?

Paul writes:

⁷*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on **God** who richly provides us with **everything for our enjoyment**.*

What if we spent some more time thinking about the HOPE we attach to money,
Being attached instead *to our faith in God?*

What would that mean to you?

And, what does it look like to *put our hope in God*---who *richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment?*

Sometimes people hear a pastor talking about money and they think---
they just want my money.

Or they want me to NOT spend my money!

But this letter reminds us that *neither is true*.

I'm talking about money because *Jesus and Paul thought it was important* for our faith, *NOT because I want it, or the church needs it.*

And no one is trying to tell you how to spend it.

And isn't it interesting that *God is NOT saying 'DO NOT SPEND'?*

But rather, *God is the one who richly blesses* us with everything –to **enjoy??**

That's an awesome view of God when you think about it.

God is NOT a tightwad.
And God is NOT greedy for your wallet!

God doesn't NEED anything from us----God is a GIVER.

The question is, *how do we view* God?

Do we see God as the one gives us riches, to enjoy?

And what are those riches?

When was the last time you spent time *counting your blessings?*

The things you've been given, to enjoy?

When was the last time you made a list of those blessings.

When I start this, I discover that it just keeps on going, and going, and going...

What are ***YOUR blessings?***

I have a family, a church, a job, a house, an education, a car...I have a heartbeat...I am RICH.

Rich, and where did it all come from?

From God, who richly provides everything for us to enjoy!

Riches and Joy.

Those are some things we might hear about in the world,
but from a completely *different perspective.*

In the world *material stuff equal happiness*, and joy.

But in the world of Christian faith, *the riches of God equal joy.*

Some of that is material, and some of it is not.

That ***word RICH*** occurs several times today.

We are rich! God is rich!

And the result?

Joy.

Enjoyment.

Did you know that all throughout the Bible,
when God talks about money and giving,
and Jesus talks about money and giving,
there is always talk of *blessings? And abundance?*

That's ***no accident.***

God richly provides everything—***for us to ENJOY!***

In Malachi 3:8-10 God talks to people who are reluctant to tithe ten percent of their goods and money—and God says this:

*Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; and see if I will not **open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.***

Did you hear that?

An ***overflowing blessing.***

Do we realize that is what God wants to give us?

An overflowing blessing?

When that ***rich young man*** walked away sorrowful, because he could not part with his money, Jesus told the crowd it was harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God... but then he said---with God ***all things are possible.***

To that, ***Peter told Jesus in Mark 10:*** “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a ***hundredfold*** now in this age—...and in the age to come, eternal life....

Today we heard ***Matthew 6:33,*** where Jesus told his followers ***not to worry*** about their material needs. He says: ***Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.***

All these things.

A hundredfold.

Overflowing blessings.

These are the ***gifts of God—do we realize it?***

Do we know ***how generous God is*** to us,
and do ***we give in the SAME generous spirit?***

Does our giving ***MIRROR*** the giving of God?

Are we *giving generously*, or holding back?
 Are we *giving first fruits*, the *best* of what we have, or only what's *leftover*?

And do we realize that *our giving leads to blessings--Now and forever*?
 Just like God's generosity blesses for generations to come?

Do you know the term **ROI**?
 The acronym for **Return on Investment**.
 Listen to Paul's talk about investing:

¹⁸ *They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,*
¹⁹ *thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future,*
so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

How are we to live?

We are to place our *hope in the riches God provides*, for our enjoyment---
 and we are to *do good*.

To Be rich in good works.

Isn't that a great way to talk about doing good things?
 Rich in good works—what does that mean *in your life*?

We are to be *generous*,
 and *ready to share*,
 storing up *treasures* for the future to take hold of *real life*.

What if we take all the riches God has provided us,
 regardless of the amount, and we **INVEST IT**?

What if we invest with our money?

Our time?

Our talent?

What if we *give now, and that generosity just keeps on going...forever*?

What does it mean for us to invest in *people*?

What does it mean for us to invest in the *church*?

In our *community*?

Aren't those the kinds of investments that have *eternal returns*?
Heavenly treasures—the kind that Jesus told us we should have?

Did you know that if you help the *Food Pantry* you are investing in the lives of people who are being fed with food, but also with love and friendship!

If you support the *Deacons* you are investing in the lives of families in this church and in our community who have serious needs, and struggles?

If you give to the *ministries of this church*—
you are transforming lives through Christian education for kids and adults,
through the beauty of music and worship,
through the power of the spoken word, and the sacraments.

You may never know what your giving does for a *friend* right beside you in church, or a *new person* who comes to visit.
Or for a member of our community!

Talk about heavenly *Return on Investment!*
That's the kind of return that lasts forever!
Jesus said: For where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. (Matt 6:21)
Giving *changes our hearts and lives.*

So today, let us think about how we are *BLESSED when we give.*
And how we get a heavenly return on that investment!

And hear the *Good News of the Gospel.*
Our *God richly provides* us with everything, to enjoy!
When we place our *hope in God's riches*, we find life.
Real life.

May we all seek that real life—and the joy of generosity!
And for that, all God's people say together, Amen.