**1 Timothy 6:17-21** August 9, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost 10

*1 Timothy 6:17Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Wealthy – For What?**

Every once in a while you are watching an interview, or maybe listening to your spouse and not paying not as much attention as you really should. (I try, I really do!) Anyway, in the middle of your half listening, something gets said that was totally not what you were expecting. It’s like when the DJ rips the stylus across the vinyl record. Suddenly, with a word, you are 100% there. “What’d you say?”

There is a word in our reading that did that to me. I was reading along, “Ok. God is talking about money. God is talking about money. God is talking about money. I already know what God is going to tell me”—and then he said something totally unexpected. Now, don’t go reading your Bible text in the bulletin just yet. I want to see if it catches you off guard, too. So I am going to read the sentence from the Bible, except for the word that snuck up and surprised me, and I want you to fill in the blank. So, here it is (remember, don’t look): ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth… but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”*** For what? Why does God give us stuff? Don’t look! I don’t want to see any of you looking down. ***“God richly provides us with everything for…”*** …for helping other people? …giving to church? …taking care of family? …food and drink? …taxes? Why does God richly provide for us? Remember, these words are written to *wealthy* people, people who don’t have to work to put food on the table. Why did God give rich people their wealth?

Maybe it is good for us to first think about what it means to be ***“rich”***, to have ***“wealth”***. Let’s try this. Imagine taking all your stuff, everything you have, and drawing a horizontal line right through the middle of it. Below the line are the things you *need* for life. Not coffee. You don’t need coffee. You might think you do, but really you don’t. Below this line you have all the stuff you *really* need: food, clothing and shelter. And even there we need to be clear, because not all the food you eat is food you need. You don’t need to spend $14 to eat out. You can spend $1.50 per serving on a home cooked meal. You don’t need a walk-in closet full of clothing. One dresser drawer will do. You don’t need a three bedroom house. A one bedroom (or maybe two bedroom if you have kids) is all you need. So put all the stuff you need, need, need below that line. Everything else above that line is ***“wealth”*** and ***“riches”***. The coffee, the coffee maker, the tools in the toolbox, the decorations that make your house beautiful, the sunglasses, the vehicle (if it doesn’t have rust on it you have more vehicle than you need), the television, the cell phone, it is all wealth.

This passage is about all the things above the line of necessity. When we think of “wealth” this way, we realize that nearly all of us are wealthy, at least a little bit. God has allowed us to have wealth, some more, some less.

Let’s get back to the test I gave you, the fill-in-the-blank one you forgot about. ***“God richly provides us with everything for our…”*** What? Here is what God’s Word says, ***“…God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”*** Can you believe it? That is not what I was expecting!

Yes, just like when your grandparents bought you that Lego set or dollhouse or bicycle and when they saw the smile on your face, the twinkle in your eye and felt the hug around their neck—just like their hearts were about to burst for joy, your heavenly Father loves to see you enjoying the things he has given you.

He loved it when you were two years old and excited about sleeping in your first big boy/big girl bed. He smiled when you got your first car or finally burned the mortgage on your house. He loves it when you savor good food, when your family enjoys a vacation and remembers it for a lifetime, when you manage to retire without worrying if there will be food on the table. He loves to give you things that bring a smile to your face. Right here it says something that I didn’t expect to read in the Bible, ***“God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment!”***

Because this sounds different from what the Bible usually says about wealth, it makes us ask questions. Usually the Bible focuses on what I am supposed to be doing with my wealth for God and my neighbor. Usually the Bible is cautioning me against being greedy and envious.

What is going on here? The point is balance. While even in this reading there are plenty of reminders to use wealth for the good of others, and warnings against money worship, the point is that we should keep a balanced view on wealth. We must also remember that wealth is a blessing from God. We should not feel guilty about having it or jealous about other people having it. Let us be thankful, whether it belongs to us or others.

Which addresses one of the hot button issues of our day. The word “privilege” has been changed into a dirty word. If someone can point at you and say that you have such-and-such privilege, it means you are immoral just for having what God gave you. Accusing people of “privilege” is the lower impulses speaking. It is envy and jealousy. Accusations of “privilege” are a denial of what Scripture teaches right here. ***“God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”*** Who provides? God. Now, what God has given, surely can be and often is used in wrong ways. And often people do get things by illegal and unethical means. But that’s not what we are talking about. Am I to be jealous of the children of millionaires just because they are the children of millionaires?

No. Instead of harping on “privilege,” let us remember that they are blessed. Instead of being jealous of people, let us give thanks to God.

**II.** Yet while God gives us things for our enjoyment. But our reading has more to say. ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth.”*** The very same people who have been given much have much responsibility.

Our human nature doesn’t do very well with wealth. We basically do two things: we get arrogant and we put our hope in wealth. Arrogance, is how wealth warps our bearing toward other people. Hoping in wealth, is how wealth warps our thinking about our own lives.

Now while we might not consider ourselves rich, let’s explore what these verses say to us.

***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant.”*** Are you? If you don’t need to use government assistance, how do you feel when checking out at the store behind someone using food stamps? Do judgmental thoughts ever go through your mind? How do you feel when you rub shoulders with people in a lower tax bracket? Feel a relief to get out of there? What thoughts go through your mind about their rusty car, the threadbare clothes? Whether or not I feel this arrogance regularly, I know that I have in my life. I know that wealth, even my very paltry wealth can make me proud. Which is so wrong because who gave me what I have? God. And yet I get arrogant like a child bragging about his remote control car while his friends only have Matchbox toys. How can you be arrogant about something given to you?

Second, ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not… to put their hope in wealth.”*** If arrogance is the interpersonal sin of wealth, hoping in wealth is the sin against God. That thinking starts, “If I can just save up this much for retirement” or “If I can just get the winning lottery ticket.” Either way, it is only a short step to putting your hope in those things rather than God. If I say, “I will work; I will save up; I will prepare for my future;” a) I must also add, “God-willing.” Only he can make these things happen. b) These should be serving a greater good than just me.

Let me give you an example. A few months ago I heard a radio program hosted by a licensed wealth adviser. A man called in who was retiring. One got the impression he had a significant, though not huge, amount of wealth. He asked the host how he could reduce his tax liabilities. She suggested that sometimes charitable giving might help, to which the man responded with a scoff, “I didn’t work and save up my money to give it to other people.” To which I heard a clunk on the radio as the wealth advisor’s jaw hit the floor. Sure, people think that, but to say it?

The Christian, hopefully, realizes that that sentiment is not only selfish, it is godless. It comes from a heart that fundamentally does not understand God’s desire for wealth. But how can the unbelieving heart? If you don’t realize that all you have in this world is from God’s hand, of course you aren’t going to ask Him what you should do with it. More than that, if you don’t realize that God has given you eternal life (not just this-world life, but eternal life), of course you will put your hope in wealth. It is your only Savior.

No. It is precisely because we trust in the great sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and his great blood-bought gifts that he has given to us, that when it comes to wealth, whether a pay check, a stimulus check, an unemployment check, or a birthday card check, even as God smiles over the joy in our eyes, we think, “What does God want me do with this?” And His smile grows.

Then we remember God’s words, ***“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*** These are such straight forward ideas that I don’t need to explain them. We need only summarize that whatever benefit comes to us, we are other centered with it. “Yes, I could finally get this or that. But what can I also do for God’s kingdom, for others.”

But here is the problem. While we Christians can beat our sinful natures into the corner and finally get ourselves to part with some of our hard-earned cash, our sinful nature will come right back. It will say, “Okay. If you have to give, then give. But how much can you really give? You have all these expenses. There was that unplanned car repair. Put a fiver in the offering plate and call it good. Give the beggar down on the corner ten bucks. That’s generous, isn’t it?” Next month it will try to entice you back to nothing.

Because our sinful nature is so scrappy and will grasp and grab for every penny it can, over the centuries Christians have adopted a standard, not as a law, but as a guide. We typically encourage people to think along the lines of a tithe, that is, giving the first 10% of whatever I get. I get a $100 cash payment and I set aside $10. I get a $1,000 paycheck, and I dedicate $100. Of course, Christians use much or most of this tithe to support the gospel ministry of their own church. And briefly, God be praised for the many who have supported the ministry of Faith even through this pandemic. Yet while offerings have remained surprisingly stable even through the pandemic, we have started to see a falling off.

If I find that I can’t give 10%, then I ask myself where my priorities are. Am I failing to ***“be rich in good deeds and generous and willing to share”*** because of my personal comfort. To tell you the truth, I can always find a way to use that 10% for my own happiness and comfort. There will never be a time that I just have cash lying around. Using wealth in a God-pleasing way is a conscious pre-meditated decision to make God, his kingdom, his desires our priorities.

Do you remember our Old Testament reading? When Solomon could do ask for anything in the world, he asked for wisdom to do his God-given duty. Then God responded—and the part that wasn’t in our reading is most applicable to our sermon. God responded, *“Since you have asked for [a discerning heart] and not for long life or wealth for yourself… I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart… Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.”*

There is the key to making God happy with our wealth. Not wealth for wealth’s sake, but wealth to balance between enjoyment of God’s blessing, and wealth generously supporting God’s kingdom and doing good to those around us. Amen.