**Stewardship Sunday – Christ’s Love, Our Calling: Love Speaks with a Focused Heart**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY September 8, 2013**

**Based on 1 Timothy 6:6-16 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**Fight the Good Fight of Faith!**

**I. Against the love of money**

**II. To take hold of eternal life**

*6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.*

Mike and Ted, two long time friends, met for dinner on a Friday night. It was a tradition they started in college and had kept alive over the past 40 years. But after that night, the future of that tradition would seem uncertain. Ted turned to Mike and said, “Mike, I decided not to let you know ‘til now, but I have cancer. The doctor said with Chemo, my chances are good, but I’ll really have to battle this out. I’ll have to keep fighting to stay alive.”

She experienced a bad turn of events. She wasn’t able to hold a steady job for a number of years, then wasn’t able to find one at all. She found herself on the street for a while but wasn’t about ready to give up. She realized she had to keep fighting the good fight.

Many things in life seem like a battle. You and I encounter endless struggles—with health, relationships, careers, friends, finances, disaster. Sometimes it seems we’re fighting against something on a daily basis, just to make it through, to scrape by, even to survive. And guess what? It’s no different with our spiritual lives. In fact, for the believer, faith is always fighting too—against our sinful flesh, the devil, and death itself. And this morning, Paul warns us about one particular enemy—the love of money. He commands us to **fight the good fight of faith**: **against the love of money**, and to fight **to take hold of eternal life**.

**I. Against the love of money**

It seemed almost everyone in the ancient city of Ephesus was preoccupied with money. Its harbor brought in ships carrying goods from all over the world. It was an intersection of major trade routes and attracted many different merchants, traders, and craftsmen, all looking to make a profit and get rich. Even the worship of Greek gods allowed the silversmiths an opportunity to bring in business as they sold shrines and statues of false gods. The teachers of Scripture got in on the action too. Sadly, they chose to abandon true doctrine and craft a corrupt message that would make them more money.

So the Christian church in Ephesus took a hit—spiritually. Paul was at this congregation for three years preaching and teaching to them, encouraging them to stay true to the faith. And now his work was being rapidly undone. The false teachers were infecting the hearts and minds of the people. And to make matters worse, even some of its own members were teaching false doctrine to make money. Paul realized something had to be done—and quick—so he wrote Pastor Timothy a letter and warned him about the love of money and explained the dangers and threats of it. By doing this, he equipped Timothy and the members at Ephesus to fight the battle against the love of money.

And he said something that makes me think too. Is the love of money really worth it? Paul says, **“We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it”** (v 7). And he’s got a point. We weren’t born with a gold ring on our finger, a silver necklace, the best clothes, or coolest shoes. And when we die, we may have our death clothes on, and be put in a fancy marble casket, but we can’t take anything we’ve earned or bought with us when we leave this earth. So why all this focus on getting rich?

That’s why Paul said, **“If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that”** (v 8). Food and clothing—that’s all you need to survive, that’s all you need to be content. So do you say to yourself, “I’ve been blessed with what God’s given me!”? Or will you only be content if you have the biggest house, the fastest car, the biggest flat screen, or the most expensive clothes?

And this want for more, this love of money starts just as a temptation. But before you know it, it traps you, and, as Paul says, causes you to fall **“into many foolish and harmful desires”** (v 9). Have you ever desired to cheat on your taxes? Have you ever desired to get a better car than your neighbor’s because you’re jealous of theirs? Or do you desire to buy all the things you know you shouldn’t even though your income and budget won’t support it?

Paul says, when you carry through with these desires, you’re only plunged into ruin and destruction (v 9). Think of all the disastrous results these desires can end in. Being suspected of tax fraud. Losing your job for stealing. Having your marriage come to an end because you failed to communicate over what you’re able to spend and what you actually did. Having to file for bankruptcy and the list goes on. You see, when you leave your desire for money unchecked, ‎you pierce yourself with many griefs (v 10), and even worse, as Paul describes, you can wander from the faith (v 10). You can lose it completely. Because when you let the love of money become your first priority, you fail to realize you have a God who provides for you. You let money become your god, and push the only true God out of your life. You become spiritually bankrupt.

But the good news is, where you and I fail in the fight against the love of money, Christ has succeeded for us! He is the eternal Son of God who took on human flesh. He was born in a poor and lowly setting—a stable—and lived among spiritually poor sinners like us. In his ministry he drew in large crowds by the sea, fed thousands at a time, healed people in ways doctors never could, performed numerous miracles. And despite all this, he never once opened his hand to receive payment and never once asked for reimbursement. He did it all for us without the love of money getting in the way! For all the times we failed to be content with what God has blessed us with, for all the times we let our sinful desires become reality, for all the times we sinned because we placed the love of money before trusting in God to provide for us, Christ carried himself to the cross. He hung on it, nearly naked, and paid the biggest price anyone has ever had to—the price to cover our debt of sin. And he paid it in full, as he suffered, died, and rose again. He went through all this so we who are spiritually bankrupt are forgiven and pulled out of sin’s debt.

**II. To take hold of eternal life**

And Jesus didn’t just pull us out of debt to our God. He added more to our account! He made us rich! He gave us eternal life!

Eternal life is a treasure in and of itself! It’s not something we earned, but Christ earned it for us. And it’s not a treasure we’ll have to wait until we get to heaven to see. It’s a treasure we have right now. It’s a treasure we’ve taken hold of, because Christ placed it in our hands when we came to faith. At baptism, as the words were spoken and the water was applied, God made sure this eternal life was yours for good. He made sure, you, His own dear child, took it and held it tightly.

And how do you and I know it’s still there? How do we know it’s ours? How can you say, “I know for sure eternal life is in my hand?” God promises us it’s ours and we’re still holding onto it. He reassures us in Word and Sacrament. Every time you open God’s Word and read about his love, you get a glimpse of this treasure stored away for you in the vault of heaven. Every time you receive Christ’s body and blood in Holy Communion, it’s like your Father in heaven is handing you another statement that shows eternal life is still yours, it hasn’t gone anywhere. Even as you sit and listen to the sermon right now, I’m telling you, “this treasure, eternal life in heaven, it belongs to you, it always has through faith, and always will.” God will protect it for us until the very end. He will always guard it from the thieving hands of Satan. Until you pass through heaven’s gates and enjoy this everlasting treasure, for all time, as you stand at God’s side.

You see, you and I *are* very rich! We’re spiritually wealthy. Our attitude has changed. We now understand the Apostle Paul’s point when he says, **“Godliness with contentment is *great gain*”** (v 6). We’re content with what God has blessed us with here on earth and we view our earthly money differently.

We see it as a great opportunity to give thanks to God for all he has done for us, by giving offerings. And it’s not just a way of giving thanks that we see! It’s a way to pass this treasure of eternal life on to others by supporting the public ministry of the gospel here at Faith. It supports our ministry to the men and women stationed at Ft. Knox who are serving our country. With your offerings and mine, we carry out our mission statement. It reads,

 “It is our mission to seek the unchurched,

 strive for spiritual growth,

 and to strengthen one another through

 the Word of God and His Sacraments.”

And your offerings extend beyond the mission of Faith Lutheran; they help other churches like ours fight the good fight of faith. A portion of the offerings that are gathered every Sunday are sent to our church body’s mission board, which distributes that money to other mission congregations. Churches like Lamb of God in Lafayette, Indiana which will be having its grand opening for their new store front church in a couple of months. They also offer a campus ministry which serves students at Purdue University. Or churches like Light of Life Lutheran in Greenwood, just south of Indianapolis. This congregation has rented a storefront for the last few years and is getting ready to break ground on a new facility. Both these congregations are taking the steps we took here at Faith Lutheran and advancing the fight to hold out eternal life to others.

And their pastors, Nick Schmoller at Lamb of God and John Stelljes at Light of Life, will be with us here tomorrow at Pastor’s Conference. Feel free to come and worship with them at 6:30, and take time after the service to introduce yourself and talk to them, or any pastor for that matter, about the ministry they are carrying out at their congregations. As you talk to them, you’ll be able to see tangible results that your offerings are accomplishing. You’ll see how the Holy Spirit has blessed their work with the support your offerings are providing.

It’s not just us who are fighting the good fight of faith, many others are as well. What a privilege to be able to support other congregations with our treasures, as they hold out the treasure of eternal life! They are spiritually rich and you’ve played a part in that. You’re spiritually rich too. So **keep fighting the good fight of faith against the love of money! And keep fighting to take hold of eternal life, “which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen” (v 15)**.