

“The Life that Really is Life”

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Someone wisely and wittingly once said, “I’ve never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul.”¹ After unsuccessfully trying to track down the origin of this clever quip, I’ve decided that it might as well be attributed to Paul, the author of this letter to 1 Timothy...since he expresses the very same sentiment, “for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it,” (v.7).

I can’t decide if it’s reassuring that the earliest followers of Christ struggled with the acquisition and accumulation of stuff just like we do today...or...if it’s disturbing that some 2,000 years later we still haven’t learned the lesson that the stuff we buy in our lifetime isn’t the stuff that buys us life eternal.

The Church, even in its earliest stages, was highly aware that Jesus talked more about money than he did anything else. His stories and sayings are full of financial references...about offerings and treasuries and taxes...and about wages, debts,

investments and rewards. In an age marked by an unequal distribution of wealth similar to our own, Jesus knew that money mattered and that money-talk could be used to speak pointedly of the clashing priorities of the culture of God with those of the present day.²

This is still true for us. There’s something about money that makes us think we can live life on our own...that we can provide for ourselves. Jesus came to teach us otherwise. If we want to learn how to lean on Jesus...letting go of our money is the best way. And this is simply because we live in a culture that thrives on the acquisition and accumulation of “things”...and we are taught that “things” are what make our lives meaningfully rich...even though “things” are not all that richly meaningful. And this is precisely Paul’s warning to Timothy.

Today’s text, though, is not condemning the wealthy. It is, however, condemning *the love of wealth*. There’s a difference. But that difference is elusive because for most of us - the wealthier we get - the more we love our wealth and become dependent upon it. And while you

¹ John Rollefson, “Eye of the Needle (1 Tim. 6:6-19, Luke 16:19-31),” *The Christian Century* (21 Sept. 2004), pg. 20. Accessed on 25 Sept. 2010 at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3126>.

² Ibid.

may be thinking, “I ’ m not wealthy” ...the fact is...yes you are.

You are healthy enough to be here today in a sheltered building...you are wearing clothes...you perhaps drank some coffee and had a cookie in fellowship hall...and you are educated enough to be able to read your worship bulletin. All of us are far wealthier than most of the world - and that means that when we read 1 Timothy....we have to read it as if it is written directly to us.

These are the final words of Paul’s first letter to Timothy. Timothy, as an apprentice apostle to Paul, is being charged to help folks figure out how to depend on God rather than riches...and in turn...to be generous and eager to share rather than stingy and quick to hoard. And if Timothy can help folks figure this out - then Paul, his mentor, says they will live “the life that really is life.” This is no small task. And even though Timothy’s being mentored by Paul about how to deliver this message...even Paul himself hasn’t succeeded at this task...and there has yet to be a pastor or preacher who has. We’re human...what can I say?

A couple weeks ago, I watched the season premiere of The Apprentice...which is Donald Trump’s reality TV show where contestants compete in entrepreneurial endeavors, showing off their business

savvy - which either earns them a job in the billion dollar Trump organization - or it earns them a no-nonsense “you’re fired” from Donald Trump himself.

This season’s premise is a bit different though: this season's 16 contestants are a group of individuals hit hard by the economic climate and they are looking for help in what is an otherwise desperate financial situation for them and their families.

This is what Donald Trump has to say about this unique season:

We have people who went to the best schools and don't have a job, people who had really good jobs before and have five kids - in one case - and don't have a job and zero income coming in. It's both sad and hopefully educational. It's very sad to see what's happened to some of these kids. Some were really high flyers and doing great and now they are totally down and out. There was a beautiful young woman who went to Stanford Law, had a great job at a major law firm and now she's selling cupcakes. It's pretty weird.

Really, it's the same Apprentice show though. The difference is the reward, rather than going out for lavish dinners – [as in previous seasons] – now the reward is the motivation of meeting business leaders who can actually help you.

Every week the winning project manager's reward is to meet with a major industry titan in various industries and areas. It's like a motivational speech to give these people a chance and it's amazing how they come out energized. A couple of them during the

filming, even though they are on a TV show and they are doing a task which is part of the job interview, the comments we were getting were, “It feels so great to be back at work.” Of course they're not really at work, they're competing for a job, but the feeling and energy of being back at work in the middle of a business task just gave them a real sense of uplift and it was really great to see.

Additionally, [even] the people who get fired each week are also helped to find their way and a replacement or better job...It's about fighting back and never giving up and I think that comes through loud and clear. Some do a much better job than others at it, just like in life.³

What I find interesting about all this is what Trump reports about - that people are energized by doing things that give them a sense of purpose...even though it has yet to give them a paycheck. Donald Trump and the apostle Paul and the apprentice Timothy might all say these contestants are “fighting the good fight” – giving all they got to get all they want.

We can learn from this...that just doing something that we haven't done in a while is a way of getting re-energized about doing that again...or even developing that skill or practice further. But giving all we got is not

³ Excerpts from an article “Donald Trump, Mark Burnett (‘The Apprentice’),” by Lara Martin, News Editor of *Digital Spy* (15 Sept. 2010). Accessed on 25 Sept. 2010 at <http://www.digitalspy.com/ustv/s140/the-apprentice-usa/interviews/a276356/donald-trump-mark-burnett-the-apprentice.html>.

about getting all *we* want...it's about God giving us the fullness of life that Gods wants for us. That's why God sent Christ in the first place. To teach us how to love. And in loving, we *really* live.

As Christinas, we all are called to “fight the good fight,” or as the Greek more accurately translates, “contest the good contest.” It doesn't sound as eloquent, but it suggests that “living the faith” requires the energy and discipline of a good athlete.⁴ It is not enough that God is calling us to a life of fullness in Christ...we have to answer that call by living out our lives *like* Christ. This is not merely a matter of the heart – it's a matter of the head and the hands as well. Not only do we have to love like Christ...we have to think like Christ and act like Christ.

So how do we become more Christ-like? Well...Paul's letter to Timothy is all about action: “*As for those who in the present age are rich...they are to do good, to be rich in good works, [to be generous], and [be] ready to share...so that they may take hold of the life that really is life,*” (v17-19).

The Nike brand would put it this way: “*Just do it.*” It's clear that if you want to live the life that really is life,

⁴ James D.G. Dunn, “The First and Second Letters to Timothy and The Letter to Titus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press) 2000, pg. 829.

you've got to *actively* do good works and not *passively* just depend on great wealth.

Years ago, Aristotle said that, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not a [singular] act, but a habit."⁵

This notion has been picked up by modern business gurus like Tony Schwartz, author of *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*. In a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*, he sums up a bunch of research that simply confirms that "practice makes perfect":

We've found, in our work with executives at dozens of organizations, that it's possible to build any given skill or capacity in the same systematic way we do a muscle: push past your comfort zone, and then rest.

Hard work - or "deliberate practice" - turns out to be more important than inherent talent. It takes 10,000 hours of practice to achieve expertise in any discipline.⁶

As Christians, we'll never be perfect experts, but we sure can become better examples. Some of the key ways we "practice" our faith are by

⁵ Mark Wingfield, "Just do It," *Tapestry: The Weekly Newsletter of Wilshire Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas* Vol. 58, No. 35, 29 August 2010.

⁶ *Ibid.*

worshipping together on Sunday, studying the Bible in small groups, praying daily, serving one another, and serving the world.

The more we **worship** together week by week...rather than every other week or once a month...the more we grow together as a Body of Christ. We gather to remember that we need one another and we need God more than we need anything else in this world.

We need to **read the Bible**...with others and on our own. Because if we're not reading God's Word regularly...whatever Word God has for us is going to be harder for us to hear. See the kiosk to see how you can plug into Bible Study if you aren't already.

And when we **pray**, we are initiating this relationship of dependence that Jesus so wants from us. It's not that Jesus needs to feel powerful because we are dependent upon him...it's that we gain the power of true contentment when we release our burdens onto the yoke that promises to bear them all.

When we **serve one another**, say by working in the nursery, or teaching church school, or visiting a sick friend, we grow closer to one another and we use our gifts to strengthen the Body of Christ where it is otherwise weak. Giving up doing what we like

to do in order to do what needs to be done for the good of our church family is what it means to be “Christ-like” to one another here at Calvary.⁷

And, finally, when we **serve the world**, we share what we have so that the rest of the world has what it needs to survive, let alone thrive. As St. Augustine so wisely said, “*Find out how much God has given you and from it take what you need; the remainder is needed by others.*”⁸

According to today’s text...if we show some humility and dependence upon God, God will show us the riches of a good life, not necessarily the convenience of an easy life. An **easy life** is one where we get everything we want and live without challenge or inconvenience. A **good life** is one where we are inconvenienced to care for others and challenged to live on less money so that more people come to know of God’s love and share in God’s wealth.

Retreat leader and author, Robert Bensen, puts it quite bluntly when he writes:

⁷ And this includes how we serve our immediate family...like what we teach our children. If you’re committed to get your child to soccer practice in order for him or her to excel as an athlete, why would you not be equally dedicated to getting your child to church school in order for him or her to practice the life of faith?

⁸ From the personal quotation journal of Anne Jernberg.

Nothing in our culture – not media, no politics, not business, not education, and sometimes not even our churches – is encouraging us to live lives that marry our religion with the rest of us. The culture we live in teaches us to get what we can, outsmart the other guy, vote for the folks who will protect our interests, buy everything that is not nailed down, and rent a storage facility if you cannot hold it all in the house you can barely afford. [Jesus, our] Teacher calls us to give ourselves away, to stop worrying about tomorrow, to do good to the ones that hate us, to seek only the Kingdom.⁹

You see, the life that really is *life*, is a life that draws its pulse from the actions of Christ, its breath from the Holy Spirit, and its strength from the Word of God and the People of God.

It is a life that requires conditioning --
- and re-conditioning.

It is a life that requires us to let go of those things that we think we need, so that our hands are open to grasp the things that God knows we need.

Amen.

⁹ Robert Benson, *Living Prayer* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.) 1998, pg 191.