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## The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 18, 2022

### God Blesses Us with Money

Like trees and flowers and health and homes, money is a gift God gives to people. Like with trees and flowers and health and homes, sinful people often misuse God's gift of money. In today's Gospel Jesus speaks to his followers about using his gift of money with humble faith and faith-inspired wisdom.

#### Sermon 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

**But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 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.**

**Command 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. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In 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.**

Introduction – Most of us don't like talking much about our money. I think that's pretty typical of most people. You can ask older people how they're feeling, and they'll probably admit a few aches and pains. You can ask younger people how school is going, and they'll tell you the good and the bad. And you can ask just about anyone what they think about Joe Biden or Donald Trump, and you'll almost certainly get an answer, probably with a little emotion attached to it. But if you ask someone what their annual salary is or how much they have invested or how much they give to church, they clam up and the silence is deafening. There are big mouths around who like to brag about their money but for most of us, money is precious, personal, and private.

God knows that our money is precious, personal, and private, but the Bible doesn't hesitate to talk about our money. Most of what God says about money is bad. Solomon had lots of money; people said he was the richest man in his world. You heard him call money **meaningless** in the First Reading. I read someplace that 30% of what Jesus said while he lived on earth had to do with money. You heard him in the Gospel for today tell the wealthy Jews, **You cannot serve God and money**. Next Sunday we'll hear the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus and you all remember where the rich man ended up.

We like our money. Money buys our food, pays our debts, puts a roof over our heads, enables an occasional night out, and assures a happy retirement. Our money is personal and we like to keep it private. But the Bible keeps butting in; the Bible writers keep sticking their noses in our business. Jesus raised so many warnings about money that sometimes we get the impression that money is bad.

Money isn't bad and the Bible never says that it is. But the Bible wants us to use our money carefully and wisely. That's the point St. Paul was making when he wrote to Timothy in the Second Reading this morning. What Paul wrote puts a positive spin on the subject of money and helps us just as it helped Timothy. This is what St. Paul wants us to know:

### **There's Nothing Wrong with Money**

Be honest in receiving it...Be careful in seeking it...Be wise in spending it

1. Paul had a close relationship with the church members in Ephesus. He had founded the congregation and preached there for two years. But Paul had miles to go on his missionary journeys and so Timothy became Paul's eyes and ears and mouthpiece in Ephesus.

The big concern there was a group of false teachers who figured they had discovered how to be godly and make money at the same time. This kind of thing infuriated Paul; Paul never connected his ministry to money. This is what Paul wanted Timothy to share with the members of the congregation: You and those false teachers have a different kind of godliness. Our godliness isn't godliness with greed. Paul called it **godliness with contentment**. It's the kind of godliness believers want to have when they think about their money.

Genuine godliness puts God where he belongs: right at the top and right in the center. When it comes to money, God is the one who doles it out. There's not a burger we eat or a blouse we wear or a bicycle we ride that doesn't come from God in some way. If God didn't want us to have a burger or a blouse or a bicycle, we wouldn't have it. But if God wants us to have a burger, a blouse, and a bicycle, then it's good enough and we can be content. Think about it. We weren't born with a burger, a blouse, and a bicycle and no funeral director is going to put a burger, a blouse, or a bicycle on our coffin. Paul wrote: **For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.** What God gives us is what he gives us. What we have is what he wants us to have. So Paul wrote: **If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**

The wonderful thing about this is that we don't have to think so much about our money. There's nothing wrong with money, nothing wrong with earning or spending or saving. But money doesn't have to consume us, it doesn't have to eat us up. Paul wrote **But godliness with contentment is great gain.** If I keep my eyes on God and his gifts, I have more time to keep my eyes on Christ and his grace. That means less time with balance sheets and more time in Scripture, less time on stock market reports and more time in prayer, less time on financial aid and more time witnessing to friends, less time worrying and more time focusing on Jesus who forgives all my sins, even the bad ones. You want to talk about great gain? That's great gain for sure! ***There's nothing wrong with money but be honest in receiving it.***

2. There's nothing wrong with wanting to make more money. There were entrepreneurs in the Ephesian congregation who were in the business of making money. Same is true today. We look for new jobs to make more money. We go to college to make more money. We invest wisely to make money. Being content with what we have doesn't mean we have to sit on a financial stump. So you have surgery and the doctor prescribes a pain killer for the first few days. You don't say, I'm content with the pain God sends. For heaven's sake, take the pill! Just don't take too many of them. People are dying by the thousands in our country because of opioid addictions. Money can be just as addictive as opioids and that's Paul's point: **Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.** The history of our world and even episodes in our community and maybe in our own families tell tragic stories of people who chased money all their lives and ended up disappointed, disillusioned, dead, and damned. Money is never the problem. Putting money before God is the problem. Work replaces worship, getting ahead replaces Bible study, success replaces faith. Paul wrote: **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.** ***There's nothing wrong with money but be careful in seeking it.***

3. There were church members in Ephesus who had money. They were good people, faithful Christians, and they took Jesus seriously. Paul certainly knew some of them by name. He encouraged Timothy to encourage them. **Command 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.** Paul wanted to remind them to be

honest in receiving their money and to be careful in seeking their money. This morning Paul reminded us of the same truths: always remember that God is the giver and always remember that greed is the taker. And then this: **Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.**

Money is precious, personal, and private. We all know that. But God knows what we earned last year and he knows what we'll earn this year and next year. He knows to the penny how much we have in our wallets, and checkbooks and savings accounts. He knows all that because he puts the money there. Since the money is his, he expects us to spend it with his will in mind. God wants our thoughts to reflect his thoughts. He wants our priorities to be the same as his priorities. If God our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth, then we want the same thing. And we spend our money to make that happen. ***There's nothing wrong with money but be wise in spending it.***

The truth is that God's words about our money have more to do with us than our money. When we look to God to see his will for our money, we also see the love of God that led him to save us. When we try to reflect his thoughts, we see the thoughts he has to forgive our sins. When we strive to make our priorities the same as his, we see that Jesus who died and rose and makes it a priority to seek us and find us. As we keep our eyes on God and his Son, Paul wrote: **In 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.**

All this talk about money? It's really not about money at all. It's all about life, life with God through Jesus life for me and life for you. Amen.