

18 PENTECOST C  
 “Take hold of the life that really is life.”  
 1 Timothy 6: 19b

**Taking Hold Of True Life**

“Lord, take my words and speak through them. Take our minds and think through them. THAT WE MAY KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE HIM KNOWN. Amen.”

Taking the paper you received I'd like you to write down what three things you would take with you if your home were in danger of being destroyed? Then reflect on the importance or priority of those things and how they relate to a good life.

Pursuing a good life is the main attraction of being a Christian. What exactly is a good life? While we tend to chase after what attracts us, Christians are taught to be careful not to overwhelm their faith with pursuits that trap the soul. The sixth chapter of 1 Timothy states that some people imagine that godliness is a means of worldly gain. We've heard of the “prosperity preachers” who insist that God does not want his people to be poor as if the “good life” were defined by a bank account and what we own.

Creature comforts are things most of us would say are necessary to be happy. Yet those comforts can trap people of faith into thinking this makes me happy. Technology gets us thinking that what once was acceptable is old and not as good. Style, fashion, what's cool -- all change with time. The old song says, “Time to remember the days of September when all was well and oh so mellow.” The song sang of nostalgia – the good old days. But I ask how were those days good and who were they good for?

God's word never changes. And Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. People are hungry for what is timeless. People are hungry for the life that is real. What is the church giving them?

The scripture lessons today are heavy handed with those that are wealthy. “Wealthy” has such a variety of descriptions in the Thesaurus: rich, well-off, well-to-do, well-heeled, affluent, prosperous, rolling in it, flush, loaded and moneyed. There were ten in all. Now how many words do you think I found for the word “Poor?” Twenty-six! There are too many to name here. As many letters as there are

in the English alphabet are there words for being “poor.” The insight that struck me in that exercise was the irony of how well defined a negative can be in our culture. It seems that what we try so hard to avoid has so many red flags, so many warnings, that our culture tells us we most avoid it like the plague.

It’s funny that we use the terms “rich” and “poor” interchangeably depending on what bill we just paid. Let’s just say then that “wealth” is relative to whom or what we compare ourselves. When I traveled to Israel and got off the bus in Jerusalem what was waiting for our tour group were children selling oranges and beads. To us they were “poor” and to them by simply getting off the bus as tourists we were filthy “rich.”

The apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to be a faithful teacher and an example of what it means to be “rich” toward Christ. Paul bids him to shun the love of money and its evils and pursue the things that are going to last. These are the qualities of Christian character that can not be bought: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fortunes come and fortunes go but Christian character is to be wealthy with God. These are the timeless things I spoke of earlier. Is the church giving these “riches” or are we selling a cheap imitation?

What is worrisome to me is that the church may only have three things it can take if its buildings were destroyed and its properties confiscated. And I fear that one of those things left behind would be its mission to restore the image of Christ in all people. God does not want us to lose our aim of knowing Christ and making him known while there is time left for us to live the “good life” here on earth.

Paul urges Timothy and all Christians to “fight the good fight of the faith.” It’s a fight for the “good life” that takes hold of eternal life now (!) in this life. And he tells Timothy how: keep the commandment you made in your baptism before so many witnesses just as Jesus testified before Pontius Pilate before his baptism into death.

This is the good confession of faith we make each Sunday in the creed. But our confession goes beyond mouthing the creed which says “I know Christ. I believe he loved me and died to set me free from slavery to sin.” A “good confession” for Paul included the public faithfulness to God which is a part of baptism: to proclaim and make Christ known to the world. This confession of the Christian is a taking hold of true life now on earth. Paul compares and contrasts the pursuit of this eternal life to the pursuit of Christ’s riches in glory. The

image we receive is that of Jesus who is called a King and a Lord but is above the riches of this world. Paul tells us he alone is immortal and dwells in the realm of light that is unapproachable. He ascended far above the earthly things that hide the glory we were meant to see.

Science fiction predicts that one day we will travel the speed of light. Warp speed will enable us to encounter other worlds distant from our own. Beams of light will be the mode of transport just as cable transports our images and voice now. Jesus came so we might live in the light of his truth. We were made for the light yet we fill our lives with things that are passing away.

This is the fight of our lives. Christians are urged to pursue the true riches which can not be corrupted by greed or poverty. And at the same time the wealth that gives comfort to our lives is called upon to become the generosity of Jesus Christ to others. To balance these two opposing forces Christian character is to be our "true life" investment that will transform us into the image of Christ.

Of those three things from home would you take with you contentment? Satisfaction? Peace? Did any of you take the family Bible? A prayer book? I look forward to reading your comments.

Take hold of the life that is really life. It can only be found in the life of Christ! It is the only investment that will last for a lifetime.  
Amen.