

Wesley United Methodist Church  
October 20, 2019

Text: 1 Timothy 6:17-19  
It's a Wonder-Full Life  
Looking Out

The scripture that we just heard from 1 Timothy is part of what is called one of the pastoral letters because it talks about the issues that concern a pastor. Things like running the Christian community, how believers live their lives together, how members are expected to behave and how the church should behave as a whole.<sup>i</sup>

In this case the letter was written to Timothy who had been sent to Ephesus (in current day Turkey) to deal with several issues facing the young church there – primarily issues of false teaching. Timothy was a young man, born in Lystra (in current day Turkey). His mother and grandmother were Jewish followers of Jesus and they had raised him in the faith. His father was not Greek and as far as we know not someone who followed Jesus.

Timothy met the great missionary and apostle Paul during Paul's second missionary journey and he joined Paul's team. In fact, he became part of the inner circle and probably the most loyal and valuable member of Paul's mission team.<sup>ii</sup>

Ephesus was a wealthy and influential port city. Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to deal with issues of false teaching that were confusing people in the church. The emphasis of the entire letter is that true Christianity is shown in lifestyles that are influenced by the Gospel. It is full of practical instruction about how to live a faithful life.

Today's section of the letter is addressed to those who have enough earthly wealth that they do not need to be too concerned about how to provide for their basic daily needs. That may apply to a lot of us as well. I don't think any of us here fit into the category of the top 1 or 2% of owners of wealth in our country, but I suspect that many of us have at least some discretionary income – money that we can use to go out to eat, or buy a new set of clothes or something that we really want.

Whether the amount of our discretionary income is a few pennies or many many dollars, there is advice and guidance for us here. First, we are reminded not to place all of our hope in our finances which may disappear. It doesn't take much for many of us to lose our financial security – the loss of a few paychecks, a large medical expense, an accident, death of a family member, or a slow down in the economy can put many of us in financial trouble.

If all of our trust is in our financial security, then these things are even more devastating than when the basic confidence in our lives is our relationship with God. We are reminded that instead of placing our hope in material things which are uncertain, we need to hope in God who provides what we truly need in order to enjoy life.

Some of us can tell stories of seemingly small things that have happened in our lives in times of difficulty that remind us that our ultimate security is in God, not in material possessions or even in our relationships. I remember one year when things were really tough financially. As Christmas approached, there was someone in this church who worked for Hasbro toys. That individual donated quite a few toys to the church to be given to families and I was privileged to be able to be part of helping to

make that happen. What I didn't know at the time was that the pastor had also set aside a couple of toys for my sons to receive.

Beyond the ways that we might be recipients of God's provision, we are also reminded that we are to be the hands and feet of God providing for others. "Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life."<sup>iii</sup>

A couple of weeks ago we looked back at our history with money both as individuals and as a congregation. Last week we were looking in at ourselves and how we integrate money and meaning by looking at our courageous vision for our presence and impact in the world. Today we are looking out – looking out at the world, asking who or what we are "looking out for" in our daily lives and the use of all of our resources – certainly money, but also our time, our abilities, our relationships, our desires, our goals, our hopes and our dreams.

Many of us may find it difficult to talk about our faith, but the way we live our lives may speak louder than any words that we use. If we look at the movie, "It's a wonderful life" we do not find anyone talking about their faith or proclaiming that they are Christian, but we see behaviors that are definitely consistent with what the letter of 1 Timothy talks about.

Peter Bailey, George's father, was an honest man who with his brother co-founded Bailey's Building and Loan to help the people of Bedford Falls build small affordable homes of their home. In doing so, he seems to be in a constant battle with Mr. Potter, the wealthy banker, who tries to control most of the businesses in town. He doesn't understand Mr. Potter's approach to life and thinks that there is something fundamentally

wrong with him because he is so greedy. At one point, he tries to explain Mr. Potter by saying, “Oh, he’s a sick man. Frustrated and sick. Sick in his mind, sick in his soul, if he has one. Hates everybody that has anything that he can’t have. Hates us mostly, I guess.”

Peter Bailey wants his son George to go to college and travel the world, but he also hopes that George will eventually run the business. Unfortunately George doesn’t recognize how important the Building and Loan is to the town. In his youthful frustration and ambition he tells his father, “I couldn’t face being cooped up for the rest of my life in a shabby little office ... I want to do something big and something important.”

His father responds by saying, “You know, George, I feel that in a small way, we are doing something important. Satisfying a fundamental urge. It’s deep in the race for a man to want his own roof and walls and fireplace, and we’re helping him get those things in our shabby little office.” Not long after this conversation, his father had a stroke and died. George doesn’t realize how well his father taught him.<sup>iv</sup>

Many years later, we hear George testifying to the importance of his father’s life and what he valued. “Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you’re talking about ... they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn’t think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped, frustrated old man, they’re cattle. Well, in my book, he died a much richer man than you’ll ever be.”

George Bailey recognized that being truly rich was not necessarily the same thing as having a lot of money. He recognized that doing good

and treating people as worthy of respect was what true wealth was really about, consistent with the scripture from 1 Timothy.

At the same time, while George was faithful to his father's vision, lived a good life, was a good father and husband, a responsible citizen and made a difference in the lives of many people, he did not ever seem to realize how full his life was. On some level, he still longed for what he didn't have, what he had missed, the opportunity to travel and to do that something big. He didn't understand that what he was doing was very big in the lives of those who benefited from his business and his work.

As we look around us, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the many things that need to be done. It is easy to see the many needs around us and to become frustrated thinking that we can't make a real difference. But that is simply not true.

Edward Everett Hale was an American author, historian and Unitarian Clergyperson in the Boston Area during the 1800's. This week, I came across a quote of his. "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do. And by the grace of God, I will."

I cannot feed all the hungry people around me, but I can feed a couple of them. I cannot change the systemic issues that make it difficult and almost impossible for some people to support themselves or to break out of the conditions into which they were born – but I may be able to make a difference in one person's life, and I can write letters or support programs that may help. I can vote for candidates who support the values that are important to me.

One of the things that I value about the United Methodist Church is our connectional system. Through our mission shares we are able to do

together what we would not be able to do on our own. Together we “are engaging the world by imitating the ministry of Jesus”. We are “building leaders, like Jesus did. We’re sharing his love with those who hunger for it and shepherding those who’ve already tasted it. Like Jesus, we’re ministering among the poor. And we reflect his healing touch as we battle disease and fight to improve global health. ... Because of our giving, ... leaders in Africa are being educated and prepared to minister in Jesus’ name. 89 year-old Rev. Fred Jackson, in the Upper New York Conference, has started a house church in the extended care facility where he lives. St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, in Kensington, Maryland, has committed to making their zip code the first ‘Hunger Free’ zone in America. Across the country and around the world, our World Service Fund empowers The United Methodist Church to be Christ’s body in the world.”<sup>v</sup>

Bishop Mary Ann Swenson explained that this “is a way in which neighbor helps neighbor and it helps Christians reach out all around the world. ... It is the way that we connect together, the way that we become powerful in our response to injustice and to poverty, and to tragedy, and to need.” “The needs around us often feel overwhelming. None of us can meet every one. But together, ... we’re sharing God’s love with the world.”<sup>vi</sup>

Our faith invites us to ask ourselves what we hope for and what we value. It reminds us that what we hope for, and what we value, and what<sup>vii</sup> we build is where we will put our resources – whether those resources be time, money, abilities, talents, or anything else. Our faith reminds us that we are called to be partners with God in creating and transforming our world and the lives of others.

“The difference between the Baileys and the Potters of the world comes both in the inner and outer worlds.” We are invited to ask ourselves

whether we reap love and generosity or bitterness and resentment? Are we creating the impact for which we hope? Or are we at least moving in that direction? “When our practices – no matter how incremental or seemingly simple – are serving our values and vision, we live with a sense of wholeheartedness and wonder that energizes us, those around us, and the world.”

When we do these things, we will save a treasure for ourselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way we can take hold of what is truly life.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> CEB Bible, introduction to 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> 1 Timothy 6:18-19 CEB

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.shmoop.com/its-a-wonderful-life/pop.html>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.umcgiving.org/ministry-articles/the-world-service-fund>

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> McFee, Marcia. Synopsis for week 3.

<sup>viii</sup> Paraphrase of 1 Timothy 6:19 CEB