

Our Scripture lesson today comes from the Apostle Paul. He's writing to a younger colleague that he mentors. Paul met Timothy a decade before and at the point of this writing, he's left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus. Here he's giving him some instruction for how to teach the gospel. Godliness with contentment is great gain, he says. In other words, godliness is a source of gain when coupled with contentment. Live a devout live contentedly, not resentfully. Live in obedience to Christ and be content that your basic needs are met.

Imagine it's a Saturday, late morning, and you're waiting for a tour of the Sayward House. Someone with a large grocery store bag bypasses James and the other Historic New England folks on the porch ticketing area. She wanders right in and start taking paintings off the walls, putting them carefully into the bag. She picks up the tea chest and into the bag it goes. You watch in stunned silence. When she starts dragging the grandfather clock toward the door, you ask what on earth she's doing. Her reply, "I'm becoming an antique dealer." The docent charges over and says, "M'am, you came in with nothing and you'll leave with nothing. Enjoy your time here and be content with that!"

You entered this life with nothing and you'll leave it with nothing. In the meantime, if you have faith and food and coverings, you are all set. We heard the passage as food and a roof, but the actual Greek work is *skepasma* and it would have meant "coverings" ie: clothing and a roof.

Clearly, something is presenting that is causing Paul to offer this guidance to Timothy. There were other teachers out there trying to profit from talking about God. One wonders if they were the early version of the 'prosperity gospel' megachurch preachers out there today.

We came into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. When we have nothing or no-thing, we have only ourselves...essentially, our character, to share with others. You're surely familiar with Paul's description of the church as the body of Christ and his body metaphor to describe how we all have to function together for the good of our entire being.

In a similar way, can you imagine what it would be like if the nose didn't share the oxygen it takes in with the lungs? Or if the stomach hoarded all of the nutrition it gains from food? Or if the heart kept the blood from your extremities? So, then, we are not to be selfish and greedy, but we are to share freely.

It's likely that you've heard today's passage misquoted as "Money is the root of all evil." The actual translation is "money is a root of all kinds of evil".

What is to be valued above all else is a relationship with God. And that relationship should guide and shape all other relationships and interactions.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a story about a man named Lazarus who sat begging outside of a rich man's house. In the end, they both die and poor Lazarus gets to heaven while the rich man goes to hell. The rich man would have observed Lazarus every time he left his house, but he didn't "see" him as his equal in God's eyes. He would have noticed him there, but didn't "see" to his needs. Was it his riches that caused him to go to hell—or was it his indifference? Could it be that his riches isolated him from the needs of others?

Money itself isn't evil, but it can lead to evil. Paul says it can lead people into temptation and to harmful desires...and even into destruction. I'd like for us to think about that together. What kinds of evil might a love of money lead to? What bad things could happen due to the love of money? What might someone do to another person or to the world? If you are willing, I invite you to turn to someone in the row ahead of you and discuss that for a minute. What kinds of evil might a love of money lead to or what bad things could happen due to a love of money? (1 minute)

What are the things you named? (Drinking, drugs, stress, golden handcuffs at work, missing family moments due to work, poor priorities, bribe taking, pollution, people working themselves to death due to heart attacks, child labor, losing jobs to other countries, lose relationships, having an unfounded sense of shame because you don't have name brands....)

On the one hand, money can buy you things or a sense of pride or a sense of security, but, as the Beatles said long ago, "money can't buy you love". Money cannot buy God's favor, it cannot buy a relationship, and it cannot buy contentment.

Last week, I saw a trailer for the Judy Garland movie starring Renee Zellweger. Some of you may know that Judy took a 5 week job performing in London about a year before she died. In the clip, she says, "You mean I have to leave my children to make enough money to be with my children?"

It could seem to some that she put her need for money above her need to be with her children. And this isn't an isolated incident. It's become commonplace today. Years ago, the father, the working parent would travel for business. Today it's not unusual for families to live apart.

I know a man who has lived apart from his family for the last five years. They're in Seattle and he's there every other weekend. The rest of the week, he was in New York, then Dallas, and now St. Louis. Yes, his daughter would drive his Tesla to her private high school, but she didn't have her father to cheer her on in crew. Yes, he can facetime and Skype with his kids, but he's not there to have dinner with them.

Those 'golden handcuffs' at work can motivate us to put profit over people....and ultimately, that love of money can cost you dearly in your personal life.

In a corporate sense, a love of money can lead to unsafe conditions, lower standards, and taking shortcuts. Do you know the story of the contractor who worked his whole life for a builder? After 50 years, he announced that he wanted to retire. The builder told him how much he appreciated his work. He gave the carpenter a \$5,000 bonus and asked him if he would build just one more house. The builder owned a magnificent lot with a spectacular view, and he wanted to build a dream home.

The contractor was deeply disappointed at the small bonus. He thought he was surely worth more than that, but he agreed to build one last house. He'd always prided himself on his uncompromising commitment to quality, but his resentment caused him to cut corners, installing inferior windows, appliances, and fixtures. He pocketed the money he saved by cutting corners and used much of it to soothe his bitterness by indulging in risky behaviors.

When the house was finished, the builder shook the carpenter's hand, and with a huge smile he said, I'm glad you've built this dream home and I hope you enjoy it. It's yours! He built a shoddy home...and he had to live in it.

Philosopher Francis Bacon said that "money is a great servant but a bad master." Let it be your servant. Learn the Lazarus lesson-see the needs and serve them. That's what our Mission Statement says, that we will intentionally respond to needs." That's why we have a pumpkin patch out front. And why scores of people helped unload the truck and set up the displays yesterday. Funds raised from that pumpkin patch go to the Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo Native Americans and to support local nonprofits through our mission work.

Just as Paul cautioned Timothy to 'fight the good fight', I encourage you to do so. Try very hard to always do what is right, honorable, and faithful—what is godly. Live in this world, but be not entirely of it. It's only part of the whole experience of life and life eternal. Blessed be and amen.