

**The First Readings come from the Book of Proverbs:
Proverbs 11:28**

Those who trust in their riches will wither,
but the righteous will flourish like green leaves.

Proverbs 23:4-5

Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
be wise enough to desist.
When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;
for suddenly it takes wings to itself,
flying like an eagle toward heaven.

The Second Reading is from 1st Timothy 6:6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷**for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it,** ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰**For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,** and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸**They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,** ¹⁹thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the **life that really is life.**

The Message is entitled, *Real Life.*

What is life that is really life? Or more simply put, what is real life? Our television air waves are still inundated with reality TV with notables such as Real Housewives trying to convince us that there is something real about their lives on camera. When I did some basic research on this genre of television, I discovered that the first such show was not produced in America. The genre started in Holland with the Dutch Series Nummer 28. It was the first television show that brought together strangers and

recorded their interactions. Reality TV, as we know it today, exploded as a phenomenon in America in the late 1990's and early 2000's with the global success of the series such as Survivor, American Idol and Big Brother. Of these three, as I mentioned in my devotion on Wednesday, I fell for watching Survivor and have watched every season since its inception. I find it intriguing to watch teams of people compete to "Outwit, Outplay, Outlast," in order to be the sole survivor in places of incredible beauty as well as relentless natural elements such as rain, heat and bugs! In case you are wondering, Survivor is currently airing its 37th season, which was filmed in Fuji. And for the first time ever there was a two-day hiatus of the game because of a life threatening cyclone causing the survivors to be evacuated for their safety. Yet, is reality TV a depiction of real life?

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, is writing a letter to Timothy encouraging him to be real, to experience life that is really life by faithfully following Christ. From the letter, it is apparent that there are some teachers who are promoting "unreal" or false teachings. So, Paul is encouraging young Timothy to fight the good fight of faith, while teaching his flock to run from anything that is not real, anything that might lure them away from centering their life in God.

Now if you were asked to describe real life or life that is really life, how would you describe it? Is it the life you are living? Is it the life we are living together as a church? Or is it possible that we are missing real life by this text's definition?

According to Apostle Paul, real life is about what we do with the life we have been given. Listen again to the elements of a real life as Paul describes it: **doing good, being rich in good works, generous, and ready to share**. Although this teaching follows this caveat, "for those who in the present age are rich," I don't believe that any of us are off the hook. This formula for real life applies to all us and in most cases those with meager resources understand this teaching better than those with far more. It seems as we gain material wealth, we are less willing to part with it. Hence the reminder that real life is not about accumulating more, it is about sharing generously what we already have.

Like hundreds did yesterday morning in this city, when Redlands Family Services, with the help of numerous volunteers, collected thousands of pounds of non-perishable foods in our community. A representative of Family Services shared at the Redlands Area Interfaith Council on Thursday morning that the food collected on this one Saturday helps Redlands Family Services meet the needs of those who hunger in our community well into the New Year. If you didn't happen to receive a bag like I did in my neighborhood, you can still participate by dropping non-perishable food off each and every Sunday in the basket we have available in our narthex, as our Board of Deacons transport these donations of non-perishable foods to Family Services year-round. Let's be generous and ready to share in this very tangible way not only during the holidays, but throughout the year.

As I read the text this morning, I wonder if you heard one of the most misquoted verses of scripture? Let me read it from the text again, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." The misquote is that "a" is replaced with "the." Note that Paul didn't say money is "the" root of all evil. As Eugene Peterson translates this phrase: "Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble." Money itself is neutral. It is in lusting after money or what we do or don't do with money that makes money a root of evil.

When we want to accumulate more and more money only for ourselves, then according to Paul, we're not being real or living life that is really life.

As the writer of Proverbs reminds us, "Those who trust in their riches will wither." Or as Paul reminds Timothy, "We brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it." It really doesn't matter how much money one has, death still comes knocking. And we can't take it with us, no matter how hard we try.

Proverbs also cautions us not to wear ourselves out trying to accumulate more wealth, because in doing so we miss out on what really counts. These words from Proverbs as well as the words of Paul are words of caution for us, whether we consider ourselves rich or not by American standards, for wealth in America is an interesting phenomenon. We most often compare ourselves to those who have more. We see those who have nicer cars or bigger homes and realize that we have far less. I know I have watched Million Dollar listings a time or two and I wonder who are these people who can afford such homes. It's easy to discount what we have in comparison to those who have even more.

But, years ago, I ran across a website - globalrichlist.com – which gave me a whole new perspective on wealth. Instead, of looking at those who had more, it looks at who has less. The site puts your annual income or net worth in relation to the entire population of the world. You can get immediate feedback from a global perspective. Let me give you an example: If your annual income is \$10,000 a year, then you are wealthier than 84% of the world or 6.5 billion people. That means in the entire world only 16% of the world's population are richer than you. If you increase the annual income slightly to \$15,000 a year, then you are wealthier than 92% of the world. If your annual income is \$50,000 a year you are wealthier than 99.69% in the world! Now, I know that argument coming about how the cost of living varies around the globe, but these numbers are eye opening. As Paul suggests, "There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment." Are you content with what wealth you do have?

So, why all this talk about money? Well, Paul makes it clear that our relationship with money will impact our faith, for the use of our money has spiritual implication. The pursuit of money, of always wanting more and more will create a barrier between us and God. Paul cautions Timothy of this saying, "Run for life from all of this!"

Yet, immersed in our 21st century American culture it is hard not to lust after stuff and we all know it takes money to accumulate stuff. The aisles filled with Christmas stuff clamor for our dollars. The relentless Christmas commercials will constantly remind us of what we don't have. Advertisers will repeatedly try to convince us that we will not be content unless we have the latest and greatest gadget. Our culture says the way to achieve real life is to have more and more and more. Even though one of the Ten Commandments says, "You shall have no other gods before me." Money can often become a god in our lives, whether our desire for money is motivated by fear of not enough or the desire for more and more. Remember, "Those who trust in their riches – who treat it like a god - will wither."

Life that is really life actually has nothing to do with the amount of money we have or don't have. It has to do with what we do with what we do have. Do we hold onto what we have or are ready to share? Are we ready to do good works, being generous with our time, our talents, and our financial treasures?

According to Eugene Peterson's translation, Paul says wealth comes from a devout life of faith. Our wealth is in the rich simplicity of being content with God and with our stuff. And so I hear Apostle Paul asking us a very pointed question about this money: When will we stop obsessing with wanting more and be content with what we have? "If we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough," says Paul.

I believe real life happens when we generously share not only what we have, but who we are with others. I hear this over and over again with people who generously give of themselves as volunteers for causes that move them deeply. Whenever we get out of ourselves and generously give of our time, our financial resources, our very selves, we come alive inside. Just ask Judy Tanner about my demeanor when I arrive in the office on Wednesday morning after spending an hour and half with first graders! I come alive as I marvel at the unique personalities of each 1st grader I work with, each a beloved child of God whether they know it or not. Real life happens when we stop being the center of the universe by focusing only on ourselves.

As people of faith, we are to passionately come alive and be rich in doing good using the gifts God has given us. I don't know how God is calling you to use your particular gifts at this time in your life, but I do know that God is calling each of us to fight the good fight of faith by being generous with what you have and who you are with others. Let's take hold of life that is really life, by doing good, being rich in good works, generous and ready to share, as individuals and as a church. Amen.