

1 Timothy 6: 6-19
Luke 16: 19-31
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church
September 26, 2010

Question: What is the subject so frequently addressed in scripture that is only mentioned in churches at stewardship time?

Answer: Money.

Yes, Virginia, it is true. Poll after poll shows two things. First that talking about money is almost always first on the list when people are asked why they don't go to church. "All they talk about and all they want is money."

This would be fair if it were true. However poll upon poll show that at least among churches like ours, money is almost never discussed. Perhaps we should put up a sign that says, Come to Hamilton Union where we don't talk about money."

Yet when faced with scripture passages like these, what is a poor preacher to do?

The answer? Full speed ahead!

This morning I want to lift out two verses. They are both from 1 Timothy.

"For the love of money is the root all kinds of evil." (6:10)

And: (The rich) are to...be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share; thus storing up for themselves the treasures of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (6:18-19)

How often have we heard it said that "Money is the root of all evil." Yet please notice two critical differences between the well worn cliché and the real verse.

First of all, Paul does not say that *money* is the root of all evil. He says that *the love of money* is the root. Paul here states that money itself is not in and of itself a bad or

dangerous thing. The danger comes from the importance we attach to money that causes the trouble. It is our *love of money*, that is, our attachment to money that is the problem.\

I rarely have any point of common ground with the politics of the National Rifle Association, although I benefitted greatly from their programs as a youth. But when they say that “Guns do not kill, people do,” they are right. Guns are guns. When used for target shooting, hunting, by the police or for national defense, with proper respect for their destructive potential, guns have a place in a free society.

It is, however, how people connect with guns on a personal level that their power and influence becomes distorted. Possessing a gun and fear of losing the right to possess a gun has lifted the safe use of a firearm for legal reasons from a normal and reasonable matter of choice to an emotional and frankly frightening high stakes issue.

Recently I saw a bumper sticker on a truck. A gun was pointed at me with the grim message: “Don’t try to take away my gun.”

My point is that guns are not the problem—people are. And the Paul makes the same point regarding money. It is not money but the *love* of money that is the problem.

Bear with me for a moment because what I am about to say may seem obscure; but to me it is important. Our English translation “the love of money” translates a single Greek word: *philaguria*. You may notice the prefix, *phil* which comes from *philios*. *Philios* expresses human love, human emotional attachment. *Philosophy* indicates a love of wisdom. *Philately* indicates a love of stamps; *philology* a love of words. When our love and appreciation of something is healthy it is a wonderful and enriching experience.

But love and appreciation can turn fearful and obsessive. When we attach too much importance to anything our relation to that thing or person can become unhealthy

and dangerous. We begin to fear the loss and so become grasping. We begin to believe that we can never have enough of whatever it is. We make getting more and more our highest priority. Before we know it we are isolated and miserable and even more afraid of losing what we have. Our lives have shrunk to the size of our desires.

Jesus' image of the rich man in hell need not be about the afterlife. The torment I am describing can be as this worldly as today's news.

Paul's use of the word *philaguria* implies that, unlike the love of collecting stamps, it is not possible to love money safely. Jesus says the same thing when he states that we cannot serve God and money. We are very clear about how God gets in the way of our love of money. We are often blind to the way that the love of money radically impairs our relationship with God and one another.

Paul's advice to rich people is, interestingly enough not to give it all away. He advises the wealthy to change their attitude toward wealth. He advises them to detach their personal investment in gaining and keeping wealth and to use that wealth as a way of loving and serving people (*philanthropy*). Rather than relying on wealth, Paul tells the affluent to "set their hopes *on God* who richly provides us with every thing *for our enjoyment.*"

Friends this is the message and the promise: God is not a miser who bitterly resents human beings enjoying life. God wants us to revel in the gift of life! But instead of a grateful full embrace of the gift of life he sees us being miserable in the midst of our affluence. God literally sees us spiritual starving in the midst of plenty afraid to lose a single penny and afraid that someone will take it away from us.

And so I lift up the phrase from verse 19 which is literal gospel. Paul advises the affluent in the congregation to be generous and willing to share so that they may “take hold of the life *that really is life.*”

Most translations simply render this phrase “eternal life.” But such a rendering misses Paul’s point. When Paul advises the affluent to take hold of “eternal life” he means to begin to experience the joy of God’s eternal kingdom *NOW!!!!* This is not the usual hollow message of give your money so that you will have pie in the sky when you die. This is not good news. This is spiritual blackmail.

The translation we have here is as powerful and hopeful as it is true. The good news is that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God initiated from heaven *the very life of heaven* so that humanity may experience it in the here and now! God sent Jesus Christ into the world so that we can begin to tell the difference between the desperate life that comes from the over attachment to money and the fear of losing it *and the life that really is life: God’s generosity and provision of our smallest requirement.*

That is why the Psalmist can write: “I believe that I will see the goodness of the Lord *in the land of the living.*”

The Lord is my shepherd, *I shall not want*—that is, I have everything I need.

It is why Jesus invites us to pray,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.