

"Take Hold of Eternal Life"

Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-12

Grace, mercy, and peace be multiplied to you from the only God that truly exists, and from his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow Servants of Jesus Christ:

Not long ago I decided to clean the surface of a ceramic top stove. I sprayed it with Windex and wiped it down with a paper towel. While you men may have no idea what happened, I'm pretty sure most of you moms do. Pretty much nothing happened. I was basically left with clean dirt. Baked on, one step removed from carbide hardness dirt. Evidently the only thing that works on that sort of surface is depleted uranium powder mixed with diamond dust paste or a good da sander with some nice 80 grit paper. No amount of scrubbing with a cloth and Windex would touch it (even though the label clearly says that it *"works great on all glass surfaces."*) (I was informed, by the way, that a sander probably wasn't the best idea.)

It occurred to me that our study of God's Word can bear some disturbing resemblances. A half-hearted, superficial effort tends to leave you with little more than shiny, polished sin. When, for example, someone skims lightly over our Savior's words in Matthew 7:1, *"Judge not, that you be not judged,"* and comes away with the notion that no one is ever supposed to condemn what is clearly sinful, they have essentially polished what is still filthy in God's sight. The inevitable result will be that the unrepentant sinner will just feel better about his sin. When someone floats gently across the surface of Jesus' refusal to condemn the adulteress that the townsmen were about to stone, and comes away with the silly delusion that Jesus didn't have a problem with adultery, they are confirming themselves and others in their deadly immorality.

In fact also Christians, with alarming regularity, have a tendency to skim lightly across God's Word, even though what is really called for is concentrated effort and candid, brutally honest application to self. Think about this as you read or listen to our text for this morning. Ask yourself, *"What do I usually 'get' from this familiar text? What is my takeaway? And what should I be getting?"* Our text for this morning is found in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, the 6th Chapter:

ESV 1 Timothy 6:6-12 *Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing,*

with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into 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 evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. ¹¹ ¶ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

These are the words of our God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our growth, instruction, and edification. That these great gifts might also be our personal possession through the focused study of these holy words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, what a faith, what a religion, what a Savior we have been given! Why would we ever even *consider* compartmentalizing our Christianity? We are compartmentalizing whenever we think, act, and speak one way at church, and then differently the rest of the week. We compartmentalize whenever we treat our faith as just another component in our full and busy lives. "Christian" is who and what we are. Not only that, it is who and what we *want to be*. Consider for a moment who in all of history has ever or could ever love us more than our Savior Jesus? Who has ever or could ever give to us or do for us like Jesus did? Jesus gave up the perfect bliss of heaven for one reason – to save us from eternal destruction in the everlasting torments of hell. Every single one of us was chained to the funeral procession shuffling toward the Lake of Fire. Every single one was under the cruel tyranny of the devil; yet Satan manipulated us so cleverly we neither knew nor cared that we marched to an eternity of unspeakable torment. Jesus knew, and he rescued humanity by taking our chains upon himself and by allowing himself to be led into such terrors of body and soul that we cannot even begin to fathom. Yet Jesus carried out this supreme act of loving self-sacrifice so that we might never have to know such horrors. The result is that we have been rescued, saved, delivered, redeemed!

How or why would we ever hesitate to identify ourselves by the Name that is above every other name? How or why would we ever desire to have Jesus Christ fill less than our entire person and being? How or why would we ever want to approach even the most insignificant

question or decision in life with any attitude other than "*What would my Savior Jesus want me to do?*"

The problem, of course, is that like some malevolent cancer we still have that evil side clinging to us. In fact it permeates our very being. Try as we might, we can never fully rid ourselves of our Old Adam, and therefore we seek to crush him into submission in mortal combat, day by day. It is, in fact, that evil side in each of us that enjoys the idea of compartmentalizing every aspect of our lives, including the exercise or living of our faith. That evil side in us would love to convince the Christian that "getting Jesus into your life" is enough, and that it is perfectly acceptable to slide in and out of our "Christian frame of mind" as Sunday morning comes and goes. The devil himself would love to see you hang your Christian faith in the closet along with your church clothes on Sunday afternoon, and then consider yourself as having fulfilled that part or compartment of your life for another week (or month?)

That, however, is nothing like what we are, nothing like what we are meant by our God to be. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 we are reminded: "***And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***" Jesus rescued us from the filth and perversion that was ours when we languished under Satan's oppression. Why, again, would we ever want to return to anything so horrible?

Yet when we stand back and examine ourselves and our lives and just how we have been arranging the various parts of our lives, our text brings a huge problem into sharp relief: we too have devoted far too much of what we have and are to worthless, temporal things. We too have been caught up in the perverse yet seductive evil that is materialism.

The very real danger of materialism is defined, at least in part, by our text for this morning with these words: "***But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into 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 evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.***"

Stop and contemplate the words that you just read. Allow them to sink in and have their desired effect. These words are talking about the ultimate horror – a terror so profound that it knows no equal; for this evil has the power to "***plunge people into ruin and destruction.***" It has caused others to "***wander away from the faith and pierce themselves with many pangs.***" What is at stake here cannot be overemphasized. Imagine

the horror of having to face a holy God on Judgment Day with the admission that you drove the Holy Spirit from your heart in favor of shallow, temporal nothings during your time of grace on earth. Imagine the terrible realization in knowing that you traded an eternity of bliss for that which will then no longer even exist, let alone seem relevant or important.

Yet knowing as we do the dangers, when we step back and examine our lives, we still see – *amazingly enough* – that some of the biggest compartments of our lives are dedicated to worthless fluff. We continue to be focused on those very things that, according to our text, possess the power to seduce and destroy every single one of us. Rather sobering realization.

How then do we do something about this great and ominous threat? How do we go about fixing that which has become such a huge problem for nearly everyone in our society? Here's where we need to go back to where we began – to the danger of actually making things *worse* by superficially tripping lightly over the surface of God's Word instead of boring into it and making it personal. In the case of our text the problem is when we come to imagine that the sum total of the Holy Spirit's message to us is that he wants us to avoid materialism. Paul's point here is actually that God, in his great love, wants us with him in heaven – and materialism wars against that. We actually work against this goal whenever we come to imagine that if we just *intend* to clean up our act, we have done our Christian duty and can go right back to the same old same old. The result is inevitably little more than polishing sin. We don't really change. We don't really do anything about the danger. We just give it a little Sunday once-over and call it good.

The problem isn't that we don't have good intentions for an hour or so each week. The problem is that we try to "get over" our materialism, but we fail. Why? First because we are treating the symptom rather than the problem, and second because we try to run from something instead of *to* something. This is where that remarkable phrase in our text comes into play: "***Take hold of the eternal life...***" All true Christians know that we can't earn our way into heaven by our actions. Jesus did that in our place. We know we cannot even, by our own power or effort, keep ourselves in this faith once it is given to us. God the Holy Spirit has to do that for us. But what we routinely fail to acknowledge is that we have the ability to access the power of God through our actions. That's how we "***take hold of the eternal life.***"

Our text indicates that trying to rid our lives of this sin will only work when we find a suitable replacement. In other words, our lives are such that whenever we try to remove something that is bad or displeases our God, we fail in the long run in part because we fail to add something good to take its place. So also not only did our text warn us to run *from* materialism; it taught us to do this by running *to* that which is supposed to replace it. Our text tells us: **"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness."** Notice especially the two parts here. The one is fleeing, the other is pursuing. Running *from* never works without also running *to*.

Jesus warned us in a parable of the danger of failing to fill our hearts with good once the evil has been driven out. ^{ESV} **Matthew 12:43-45** **"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."**

How then can you and I beat this thing? How can we ever hope to master what is arguably one of the most seductive of all of the devil's temptations? It begins, of course, with prayer. Start each day not just by commending yourself into God's care (which is good, of course) but also by asking him for several things every day: wisdom, strength of faith, opportunities to serve and witness, and freedom from the love of sin. This is a key part of "putting on the new man." God does not demand that for which he does not also supply what is needed. The problem that most of us have is that our hearts need work. Our desires and aspirations are all backwards and convoluted.

This is not to say that we are to deprive ourselves. On the contrary God wants us to have the very best. It's just that our appreciation for what is "the best" needs adjustment, as does our understanding of how to possess it. Note how our text said that **"there is great gain in godliness with contentment."** There is *"gain"* of course because contentment means that we will be satisfied and happy with whatever our God gives us. No amount of wealth can buy something like that – which is why it is just another example of how much our God loves us.

Speaking of wanting the best for us, toward the end of our text we read these words: **"Fight the good fight of the faith."** Our salvation has been earned for us. Yet for a Christian, life on earth will always be a challenge, a struggle. Love of stuff draws us away from our goal. It misdirects us away

from what our God wants to give us. He does not want to deprive us; he wants to bless us beyond our wildest dreams *eternally*, in heaven. God therefore hates whatever pulls us down or draws us away. May that same God then create in each of us hearts that love what he desires, and there direct our lives of service. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Amos 6:1-7** "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! ² Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, ³ O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence? ⁴ "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, ⁵ who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, ⁶ who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! ⁷ Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away."

^{ESV} **Luke 16:19-31** "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- ²⁸ for I have five brothers--so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The 19th Sunday after Pentecost – September 25, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 424 (1-4, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"My God, My Father, Make Me Strong"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Amos 6:1-7) The general theme for our readings this morning is the evil (and therefore danger) of materialism. Such temptations are, of course, nothing new. Also in ancient times God condemned those who loved pleasure and ease more than justice and charity. Our first lesson so reminds us.

The New Testament Lesson: (Luke 16:19-31) Our second reading this morning reminds us of the temporal nature of all material things, together with the foolishness of focusing our lives upon such things. The key is not in learning to hate that which is material, but in learning to love our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as we love ourselves. Such an attitude will lend itself perfectly to learning to appreciate, but not be controlled by, God's material blessings.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 250 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy God, We Praise Thy Name"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-12 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Take Hold of Eternal Life"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 304 (Verses 1, 3, 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 651 (1-2, 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Be Still My Soul"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Ave (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Roehl has returned the call to Zion of Atlanta. Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. Pastor Paul Tiefel is considering the call to Grand Rapids.

Regular Schedule – Our regular weekly schedule resumes this week. Please also remember that anyone who wants to retake their bulletin board picture can do so next week during the fellowship time.

Organ Dedication – Our Organ Dedication Service has been scheduled for October 16. The Church Council will finalize the service time at the meeting this morning. If anyone has a preference (i.e. during the regular service or in a special afternoon service) please share your thoughts with a Council member prior to the meeting this morning.

CLC Coordinating Council Summary – A summary of this past week's Coordinating Council actions will tentatively be available no later than next Sunday. For additional information please see the Pastor.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning following the fellowship/coffee time.