

Sermon on 1 Timothy 6:17-21

St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran, New Ulm 8.14.17

How many squares of toilet paper do you need when you go to the bathroom? Please don't answer out loud. But do think about it. How many do you need, want, can you afford? Strange question? I was confronted with this question when I was at language school in Puebla, Mexico and we were going to visit archaeological and cultural sites in Mexico City. Mexico is rich in culture, people, history and many things, but economically there are differences. We stopped at a wayside, and a bathroom attendant sat in the courtyard between the bathrooms and sold you squares of toilet paper. Convert U.S. dollars to pesos and multiply the price of each square times how many you want or think you'll need – and estimate high for it – you don't want to be caught a few squares short, believe me. How many squares do you need?

Growing up as the 9th kid in a family of 14 kids, in the slumburb of West Allis, Wisconsin 50 yards from Interstate 894, working a paper route and odd jobs by the age of 11, thinking through every purchase I made to the cent for most of my life I never ever considered myself rich. But as I stood in that courtyard on the Mexican highway I realized how wrong I was. I am rich. That's not arrogant or a confession. It's simply true compared with other nations. And you are rich whether you have millions in your retirement account or you get by on government subsidy (we have government subsidy!), you are rich if you are sitting in these pews at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minnesota. We may see ourselves as struggling or anxious about our finances or the future, but realize that looks like a joke to everyone else in the world. How many squares of toilet paper do you need and how much can you afford? Repeat after me, "I am rich."

The apostle Paul tells Pastor Timothy to tell you and me this, ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in doing so have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.”***

Earlier Paul said (6 v.10), *“For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”* The love of money, greed, changes people. If they get wealth they look down on others. They are proud in themselves and in their wealth and they think

that everyone should listen to them – their ideas, direction, and wants because, well, they’ve made it and are successful and rich. In their pursuit of wealth, they have lost something important, God! They are like the Rich man who had Lazarus outside his gates. The rich man had faith in his riches, not God, and ended up in hell. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who had so much wealth he wanted to build bigger barns to hold it and his heart was only for his wealth – God told him his life would be taken from him that very night. Having wealth in a culture intoxicated with money and things easily leads to pride.

But what if you have been blessed by God with wealth the right way – God first in your heart and in your budget you’ve worked hard in a godly way, inherited wealth, or had a windfall? Thank God! But be careful not to find your self-worth in it like a rich fool or depend on wealth for your future. Paul says wealth *“is so uncertain.”* Wealth can be quickly consumed by catastrophe or accident, medical emergencies, stock market plummets, an old-fashioned war, or God can simply pull it. Job of the Old Testament lost his wealth in a day. One of my mentors lost \$100,000, his inheritance, in one day, when that sure investment called “Enron stock” plummeted to pennies on the dollar. Don’t put your heart or your hopes in wealth whether you have a lot or a little. Paul says that you either have your hope in money and wealth or you have your hope in God.

Paul says, *“In this present world.”* Remember that when it comes to “wealth,” it is only for this life – a small percentage of your forever future. But wealth still is a blessing from God. Every good and perfect gift is from above James tell us. Paul told the Philippians that we can be content with simple sustenance – shelter (clothes, roof) and food. God gives us so much more than that. Have you had a Big Mac or a Whopper in your life? Solomon never did. How about a Sweet Onion Chicken Teriyaki sub with a bag of Cheetos and a Soda? King Henry didn’t. Ever driven 70 mph in a car or flown in a plane, Most people in history and currently in the world today haven’t. We have so much more than any nation of any age. So what do we do with this wealth?

First – give thanks to God who gave it to you and never forget it is his rich hand that has abundantly poured this out on you because of his grace (he got you the job, the talent, the opportunity, the windfall, the blessing). Second – enjoy it. God does not command us to be ascetics – to go around in burlap and eat bland food with grimaces on our faces judging others who make use of God’s gifts. Enjoy the gifts God has given to you. Immediately I think of vacations – Florida or 7 mile Pinecrest Resort, trips abroad, a ski boat, a 1988 Chrysler LeBaron drop top that still runs. I would accept a LeSabre ☺. While those things aren’t out of the question for a person whom the Lord has blessed financially if it is in proportion, Paul immediately gives the better way to enjoy wealth and to *“really live.”*

“Command them to do good (ἀγαθοεργεῖν), to be rich in good deeds (πλουτεῖν ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς), and to be generous (εὐμεταδότους εἶναι) and willing to share (κοινωνικούς).” “Do good” with your money. Money invested in stocks and banks at best only yields more money. While that isn’t a bad thing, better is to “Do good” with it. Support the work of sharing the Gospel - giving to the Lord’s work here at church and at school, and to the mission work of our synod and our schools. I have been impressed by the generosity of this congregation in so many ways. Keep doing good to others. *“Be rich in good deeds.”* Whether young, old, working or retired, use what time God has given you to serve others at home, at church, at work, and in your community. So many people serving – over 500 active volunteers in this congregation at church, and over 200 in the school not to mention your activity amongst family and the community. Keep it up. Our Member Ministry group stands by if you want to find where you and your gifts can best serve.

“Be generous and willing to share.” Enjoy wealth by giving to others. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20). Give people a hand up not just a hand out (“to the lowly”). Get shoulder to shoulder with them as a mentor and as a sister or brother in Christ. Be a *“fellowshipper.”* Don’t be too good for anybody. Come to the Lord’s house and his table regularly because you need Jesus just as much as the next person. Have coffee and donuts with the nicely dressed and the poorly dressed, the rich and the poor. *“Don’t show favoritism.”*

“In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” Jesus himself said it this way (in Matthew chapter 6) – *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* *“Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will wear...Seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”* This is good advice – as you the Lord has blessed you and as you return to him a portion of that blessing to him, you also glorify him by serving others with your wealth. Your heart and your treasure are in heaven with Jesus. Don’t be like the world. Be different.

What is the most valuable thing you have? Do you lock your car or truck? Do you lock your house? Is your bank or credit union insured by the FDIC? Do you have homeowner’s insurance? We lock up things that are important and valuable to us. But Paul doesn’t just use the word for lock up here, he speaks of something not only worthy of locking up for ourselves, but also guarding like a soldier ready for attack – And what is it? *“Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which*

some have professed and in doing so have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.” Guard the faith, the truth of God’s Word – of salvation by grace alone - for yourself and others. Guard God’s Word for yourself and the next generation. It is so important that if some are diverting from the truth or promoting a lie that isn’t in line with God’s Word, don’t just turn a blind eye, Turn away from them. Separate. Why?

The most beautiful statement of all says it, *“Grace be with you all.”* In Sunday School, Wednesday School and in our Lutheran Elementary School we define Grace as “undeserved love.” Theologians will use the term “favor Dei” or “The favor God has for us.” We sinners, bound in the chains of guilt and destined for hell because of our sin have a Savior. Jesus Christ redeemed us, lost and condemned creatures, purchased and won us from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

Hugh Jackmann and his wife, Debra Lee Furness, have a net worth of 150 million dollars. They adopted two children. To go from the orphanage or foster care without family to being welcomed into a family of millionaires. Do you think Hugh and Debra left their old clothes on them, or made meals just like they did in the orphanage or foster home? What riches were immediately theirs, what inheritance would one day come to them all because they were adopted. You were adopted too! At your baptism, God, the generous, almighty and all-loving One, adopted you into his family. He took off your old clothes of sin and shame, washing you clean with Jesus’ blood, forgiven for all sin. He put on you the robe of Jesus’ righteousness and wrote the family name across you “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Your inheritance is in heaven and God richly provides for you here and now. You aren’t just rich for this life, Jesus made you rich for eternity. Enjoy both and share both. Amen.