

The Life that Really Is Life  
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I Timothy 6:6-19

✠ In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

I once had a conversation with a person at my last parish, in Newport, Rhode Island. Newport, as you are likely well aware, was at the epicentre of the Gilded Age in the United States and remains an enclave of unimaginable wealth. The man with whom I was having this conversation just happened to be a member of a family whose net worth, at its height, was once estimated at around \$2.6 billion dollars. I looked him square in the eye, and I said, "You know, the Good Book says "money is the root of all evil." Quick as a flash, he shot back, "No it doesn't. It says the *love* of money is the root of all evil." Sure enough, 1 Timothy 6:10 in the Authorised or King James Version reads, "For the love of money is the root of all evil." I had conveniently left off the first four words of the verse. The New Revised Standard Version, which we heard just now, softens it even more: "For the love of money is a root of *all kinds of evil*." So not even *all* evil. Just some of it. Isn't that a relief?

My rich friend and I could spar about money because we both knew that he did not, in fact, love it. He was well aware of its pitfalls and traps. He was well aware of its evils, when valued above its real worth. And that's what the love of money is, after all: valuing something more than it is actually worth. It's a sort of emotional inflation that distorts reality. And by reality, I mean our relationships. The emotional inflation that the love of money distorts affects our sense of self, our relationships with others, particularly those closest to us, both friend *and* foe, our relationship with the created order, and most of all, our relationship with God.

"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."

The opposite of the many pains that accompany the love of money is contentment: Being happy with what you have, the less, the better. Food and clothing. The basics. That's all we need. But a funny sort of economics arises out of a contentment with simplicity: godliness, when combined with contentment, results in a "great gain." Paul doesn't really get to the point of what that "great gain" consists of until the end of our reading, when he advises Timothy, "As 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. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus 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 life that really is life." By this phrase, Paul means eternal life, of course, but he also means something that starts in this life and continues forever: leading redeemed and reconciled lives day by day in the light and truth of Christ, here and now, as we grow in God's grace. We find "the life that really is life" when we see reality for what it is: a gift from God in which we are called to find "godliness combined with contentment."

Now let me be clear that we will never find either godliness or contentment on our own, or through our own merits. It's a gift, remember. But *when* we remember that it is a gift, we can begin to see what is essential in life: right relationships with ourselves, each other, with the world around us, and with God. That's a tall order, I know. So how do we get more concrete about this?

To be blunt: It all comes down to money. Or, more specifically, our relationship to money. Nothing in this world is a more reliable spiritual barometer than money. How we feel about it, how we make it, how we save it, how we invest it, and most importantly, how we spend it or give it away, is the surest indicator of our spiritual health, no matter how rich or poor we might be. I say this because, having lived and ministered in Newport, Rhode Island, where billionaires knelt at the same communion rail next to homeless people, nearly every single one of them had the same feeling in common: When it came to money, their immediate, gut reaction, was "I don't have enough of it to go around."

Now, one might be tempted to think that was just delusional thinking when it came to the rich folks: Of course they had enough to go around! But when you talked with them, they often made a point: No matter how much money they threw at something, it never seemed to solve the problem.

But there were a few people, both folks I can think of who were living in public housing and folks who lived in the nicest houses I've ever set foot in, who knew that even though money never solved all their problems, holding onto it only made things worse. The most generous people found "godliness combined with contentment", and through their generosity, they tapped into "the life that really is life."

Of course, it's in my best interests to preach this sort of sermon, because obviously, I'm hoping you will all be extraordinarily generous when it comes to giving to the Church. But it's true. The most content people in any congregation are those who are giving away, proportionally speaking, the greater part of their possessions to those places that they believe offer the best access to "the life that really is life". And if you're hearing this sermon, in person or via a recording of this livestream, you're in luck, because you happen to be in one of the best places in Canada to find "the life that really is life". Don't believe me? Believe the Bishop! He stood here just last Sunday and said that we "are known not just well in this diocese but across this land. And I discovered at the Lambeth Conference that many a bishop in the communion knows St. Thomas, Huron Street, so you come well known, which ... comes with a greater sense of responsibility and care for this tradition that you nurture and live out every day."

Now, we could dismiss those words as empty flattery. Or we could lap them up and swell with pride and self-satisfaction. Or we could take them as indicating that we are, at our best, accessing that gift of grace that leads to "the life that really is life." More than that, we could recognize that the only way we can take responsibility and care for this tradition that, by the grace of God, is actually doing something good in the world, is by nurturing it and living it out every day, in our practises of prayer and worship, in our outreach and service to the world, and in our stewardship that ensures that we have the people and resources we need to continue giving people access to "the life that really is

life” without stressing out our volunteers, or filling our staff with existential dread when it comes time to pass an operating budget every year.

It’s as simple as that. Through St. Thomas’s, God is giving us access to “the life that really is life.” Do you believe this? I do. With all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I wouldn’t be living in Canada if I didn’t. Through St. Thomas’s, God is giving us access to “the life that really is life.” And it is up to *us* to make *sure* that we *continue* to ensure that we *can* do so, in faith, hope, and love, this year, and next year, and every year.

So let us not set our “hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. [We] are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for [ourselves] the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of the life that really is life.”

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