

## **“Don’t Hold Back”**

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

John Knox Presbyterian Church – September 29, 2013

1 Timothy 6:6-19 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people in ruin and destruction. 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. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight 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.

In 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 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, who no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and dominion. Amen. 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 of 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.

My husband is thinking about taking early retirement after this school year. To help us with this decision, we decided to sit down with a financial advisor. We had two meetings. During the first meeting, we handed over all the dollar numbers we believe we needed to live comfortably as we look to the future. The financial advisor took this information back to her office to crunch the numbers and see where we stood. At our second meeting, we were given a 33 page bound document which contained graphs and numerical columns that gave insight into our future years.

Now, I am not a numbers person! I could tell you that by page 20 I was totally confused. It wasn't until page 30 that she was able to produce the magic number of how much my husband would be receiving as his monthly income until Social Security kicks-in. It was not so bad and from her perspective we should be very content with this. But then we got to page 31 and it got interesting. She suggested that if we would want more or need more monthly income we should look at cutting our gift giving, our charitable giving and our vacation allotment in half!

I asked her for clarity on this. She said, “Mrs. Crismore, you have to realize that your husband will be making less money and you may have to cut in some areas of your spending.” I know that she was there for my husband as he was the one to make the appointment. But, I wanted to get an attitude with her and say, “HELLO, I am a lay pastor of a church and it is from charitable giving that I receive my livelihood!” It is not only my pay check, benefits and pension that comes from charitable giving but it is everything we do in the church! Now, I was nice to her but when she left I had some things to say to my husband. Then, it hit me that these are the tough decisions that face many people in retirement. These are the tough decisions that many of the people in our congregation face! I pray we never have to cut our charitable giving because I know what it will do to the church but we have not walked in our retirement shoes, yet.

I wonder what Timothy would say to this financial advisor. Timothy has been charged with leading the newly formed church into the future. He has been given guidelines and today we read that he has been informed that contentment is not based on what is in your wallet but in your relationship with God and others.

Now I have a difficult time believing that Timothy is rich. He is a pastor of a new church development. He is not driving a new Mercedes Benz convertible; no, he is probably getting around on foot or a donkey. He is not living in a mansion decked out with gold trim; he is living

probably in a tent or with some of the members of the church. I wonder if Timothy got to chuckling when he got to this part of the letter. Me rich, come on Paul, seriously!

Or did Timothy know that this was a warning about the future? Perhaps it had to do with once the church was established. I have a dear friend, who is a pastor in Pennsylvania. The church, where she serves, has struggled through these tough financial times but they are still doing a lot of good ministry in their small town. They have a beautiful old building that sits on a side street off the main drag. This church owns two homes across the street from where it resides. One of the homes houses their Christian Education center. The other one is rental property. Recently, the tenant moved out and the church has decided they no longer want to be landlords. They are in deep discussion on what to do with it. My friend and others have had visions about a coffee house, Christian bookstore or adult daycare. But there are some very vocal leaders in the church who want to sell the church and hold onto the money. They are scared of the future. I think Timothy would tell them "to shun all this, men and women of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

My husband and I credit the opportunity of early retirement to taking Dave Ramey's Financial Peace classes at John Knox. I have to be honest and say that we have not followed his teachings to the letter! But, it has given us sound advice on how to handle our money. Dave Ramsey is a very rich man. In his program, the first couple steps focus on building an emergency fund of \$1000 to help you through those unforeseen expenses. But once the emergency fund is in place then he spends a whole chapter on the need to give financially to a church or a charity. Even before this he stresses the need to give of your time and talents. Dave bases this all on scripture.

I believe Timothy is being coached today by Paul about staying in balance. This is hard to do especially when you hear words like righteousness and gentleness used together. How do you stand up for what is right when you know someone is wrong and then we read that we are to fight the good fight in faith and to do all this with gentleness. Last week Emily Damone spoke about the difficulty of being humble but also being bold and confident in speaking out for justice and faith. Paul knew it was not going to be easy for Timothy or anyone in the church to walk faithfully.

This letter goes on to say, "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." Is this not what happens in our baptisms? God names us, claims us and calls us into service. Just like Christ, we are called to live out that faith!

There again, it is difficult to do this when we live in a society that is so self-absorbed. Society's contentment is not found in God or doing good for others but in doing good for ourselves! The Disney Corporation has announced this week that they can no longer allow physically handicapped people the front of the line. It is not because they don't care about these people. It is because too many people were taking advantage of this! Disabled people will now have to get a pass and stand in a short line like the fast pass people. How many times can you recall the selfish actions of others ruining it for others in need?

I find it interesting that this passage showed up in the lectionary as we head into our stewardship campaign and as our nominating team is asking people to serve as officers in the church. We at John Knox do an amazing job at being an open, caring, community.

On Thursday of this past week, it was a glorious day in the life of our church. We had two people here doing community service. These are people who have received from our new beginnings program and our giving back in return. We also had Cindy Banks come in for some food to tie her over until her disability check arrives. Cindy is mentally disabled and she has been coming to John Knox for help for the past 9 years, which is the time that I have been here and maybe longer. Then we had a young man come through our doors looking for information about employment. He

shared he had just lost his mother and had to leave college to return home to take care of her affairs. Kim got him some food from the New Beginning pantry and Kim and I held hands with him and prayed. Frank was visiting a member of our church and couldn't join us. Toward the end of the day, I loaded Cindy into Carolyn Lyons' car so that she could take her over to the bus stop at Speedway Shopping Mall. I came in and I looked at Kim and said, "All in a day's work!"

We are helping people in need. We are making a difference in a community that on that same day was holding a funeral service for a beloved police officer, Rod Bradway, who was killed in the line of duty. Our city is looking at 105 homicides as of today in comparison to 85 for last year. These numbers blow me away and I know I keep harping on them. But we as the church can't stop helping people. **WE CAN'T STOP! WE CAN'T HOLD BACK!** We have got to continue to reach out because it is evident that our community needs us.

But I wonder what is Timothy saying to us as individuals? I was struck by many of the things the youth talked about in their messages last week. It was Zach Stiles who had the courage to say that he isn't always the Christian we see here at church. How many of us can relate to his confession and his struggle. I think we all can!

But the good news for all of us is a message that I got from Dr. Kara Powell, who taught our Sticky Faith workshop a couple of weeks ago. She told her little girl, who was feeling guilty for something she did, that Jesus is **BIGGER** than any of our mistakes! And it is because of that grace, mercy and abundant love that we receive from Jesus, we say **THANK YOU. WE SAY THANK YOU** by obeying and being his hands, his feet, his voice, his ears, his face and yes, even his wallet!

Thanks be to God, our creator, redeemer and sustainer, who calls us to be generous and to do good works! Amen.