**The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

*September 28th, 2025*

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**Checking Our Compass**

I know a man who was really affected by the Second Letter to Timothy we heard today. I wouldn’t call him a particularly religious man, but he has regularly attended church. Over time, I have known him to go to different congregations, different denominations. And we all have our reasons for coming to church. Some have always done it. Some enjoy it. Others sense their mortality and feel going to church is a way to navigate that.

For my friend, he is attracted to the music. He likes listening to music in churches (and elsewhere). He likes performing. His story is similar to many others. And, though I don’t know how often he reads scripture, in conversation, if the topic of money comes up, he will reference this letter and note, “People say that money is the root of all evil but it’s actually the love of money.” And he’s correct in pointing that out and correct that many shorten that phrase and say, “Money is the Root of All Evil.”

It is as if you were a bad person for doing well or for coming from wealth. As if there were a choice to be made between wealth and character. But the choice is a different one than many think it is. My friend isn’t what I would call a wealthy man, but he is a comfortable one—perhaps more comfortable than most. He owns multiple cars and has a large house with his partner, has raised a family, weathered a divorce, and travels and eats at the restaurants he chooses. I’ve met really rich people and he’s not like that, but perhaps because of the lifestyle he leads, this passage gets him thinking.

“Why do I do what I do? Am I doing it for the right reasons? Where is my compass pointing?” These are the kinds of questions we all face from time to time.

So, what is Paul talking about here? He is talking to us about priorities. Wealth, status, power, and possessions were just as important in Paul’s time as they are today. He starts the excerpt by saying, “there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.” We can be people of character and also enjoy the finer things in life. We do not need to lack for anything. But he says those who want to be rich are easily tempted. So he says to Timothy, rather than going after wealth, “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, [and] gentleness.”

So is the issue he identifies really about money? In my estimation, no. The issue is, as the proverb states, that if you chase two rabbits, you might lose both. Of course, in our lives, there are many times when we need to balance competing priorities. But Paul reminds Timothy and all of us that in those times when we are torn between material concerns—things to do with money but also other physical things—that we, and everyone else, are better when we choose to walk a higher road. We can choose to serve others, choose to love others, and do this with endurance and patience rather than simply pursue material things.

He says later in his letter, “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.”

This ties in well with the message of the Gospel today. A rich man feasts while Lazarus starves at his gate. Both the rich man and Lazarus die. Lazarus is in heaven and is being treated well. The rich man is in Hades and begs for forgiveness in the hopes of going to heaven. Abraham, who is with Lazarus, says the rich man received good things during his life and Lazarus did not. Now it is time for Lazarus’s suffering to be lifted and the rich man to pay for not being a more caring person while he was alive.

The rich man begs to tell his family what he has found. Abraham says they have Moses and the Prophets. The man says they will be more likely to believe if he returns from the dead. Abraham replies, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

And so we have an example of a man—Lazarus—who struggled in earnest and has his burdens lifted, and another who did not live as well as he could have. The rich man was wealthy but acted only for his own benefit. He pursued wealth for wealth’s sake and didn’t share even with those who needed it most, like Lazarus. In the parable, he is punished for it.

But I would argue that we do not need to die and go to the other side to understand this lesson. If we open our eyes, we can already notice this pattern happening in front of us. Do we enjoy it when others act as if they have more than us, whether they do or do not? Does that stir in us a sense of veneration? Do we praise a person if we hear they did something for their own benefit at the expense of others? Someone who took more than they needed in the effort to quell an unquenchable thirst within them for more?

A person like this may be rich and they may be powerful, but are they admirable? If they lost all they had today, would people be so quick to crowd around them then?

What we hear in today’s Gospel and in Paul’s letter to Timothy is not necessarily a map to the afterlife, but guidance on how to live a good life now. This week, take a couple of minutes and think about your life. Think about the direction you have been going, what activities you have been filling your days with. Are there things you could be doing to show more love, more of that gentleness that Paul mentions?

Where is your compass pointing? Why do you do what you do? Does it still serve you? The love of money is the root of all sorts of evils, but the use of money and of our time to help and serve others can be a source of great good. Let us take stock and see what guides us at this moment and seek change as necessary.

Amen.