



Pentecost 16

September 28, 2025

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

THE SERMON: "Whom Do You Trust... God or People?"

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Since St. Timothy is emphasizing stewardship in October, it seems appropriate that this week's lessons deal with our use of wealth. It's ironic, isn't it, that a lot of preachers will preach to their congregations that money is the root of all evil and then ask members for more money. But, we know that Paul told Timothy that it was the love of money, not money, that was the root of evil. Nevertheless, I think most of us like to hear "rags to riches" stories. I don't know if this story is true but one of my college buddies told me this story about how an elderly millionaire in Whittier got rich. While doing yard work for the millionaire, my friend asked how the man made his money. The old gentleman replied, "Well, son, it was 1932 - the depth of the Great Depression. I was down to my last nickel. I invested that nickel in an apple. I spent the entire day polishing the apple and, at the end of the day, I sold the apple for ten cents. The next morning, I invested those ten cents in two more apples. I spent the entire day polishing them and sold them for 20 cents. I bought and sold apples for a month. And, by the end of the month I'd accumulated a fortune of \$6.00." After a very long silence, he drew my friend closer and whispered, "Then my wife's father died and left us two million dollars. That's how I got rich." And, he laughed and laughed how he suckered in my friend. And, my friend laughed because he had suckered me. Well, most of us won't inherit millions but we keep hoping that we're going to hit the jackpot in the Publishers' Clearing House Sweepstakes or the Oregon Lottery, don't we?

Amos 6:1

But, our first lesson is probably about people who got wealthy by dishonest means. We know this because other prophets have warned about the corruption, fraudulent practices, and deceit that lined the greedy pockets of the rich and oppressed the poor. They completely ignored and abused the commandments given to Moses to care for the poor and the widow and the alien. So, into that corrupt, unscrupulous society in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, a poor shepherd from the Southern Kingdom named Amos is sent by God to warn those Northerners, “Woe to those who... feel secure on Mount Samaria... Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory... and eat lambs from the flock... who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp...who drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!” As I’ve been trying to say in my sermons, the Bible is not about one time in history. The Bible is about human nature. This kind of abuse of wealth has happened throughout human history. It happened in Egypt; it happened in Babylon; it happened in Rome; it happened in the French monarchy when Marie Antonette said, “Let them eat cake” when she was told about the hungry French peasants. It’s happening today when most of the wealth in our country is hoarded by a small minority, while the majority of us struggles from paycheck to paycheck with what’s left over. But, Amos wasn’t just speaking about the greed in human beings; he was also warning Israel that there are consequences for our greed. Powerful Egypt fell; Babylon fell; Rome fell; the French monarchy fell... They all fell like a row of dominoes. Amos is warning that there are consequences for the misuse and abuse of wealth. And, it’s still true.

1 Timothy 6:6-19

That’s what Paul is telling Timothy in his first letter, “... there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment... 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 into 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.” And, Paul continues, “... 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...” Then, our lesson concludes with a stewardship lesson, “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... They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share... so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.” What life is really about is what Jesus told us is the Greatest Commandment, “Love God, love our neighbor.”

Luke 16:19-31

That’s what Jesus is doing in the chapters preceding today’s gospel. He interacts and eats with the outcasts and sinners; he heals the sick on the sabbath; and, he’s criticized by the religious leaders for doing good. And, like Amos, Jesus warns that there will be consequences for their neglect of the poor and the needy and his warning is disguised in today’s parable, “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.” What a striking contrast! But, we know the rest of the story: they both die and Lazarus is transported to be with Father Abraham, but the rich man is sent to Hades where he is tormented with misery. Another striking contrast! Then, the rich man pleads with Father Abraham, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.” But, Abraham says that’s not possible and the tormented rich man pleads, “Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house...that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Then, Abraham replies, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them... If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” Jesus is saying that there are consequences for our actions. And, it’s just as true now as it was in Jesus’ time.

Psalm 146, The Call and the Challenge

Moses told Israel, the people of God, “Choose God, choose life. If you choose life without God, you’re choosing death” and today’s lessons remind us that too often people chose a life without God. That’s why our psalm this morning tells us, “Do not put your trust in rulers, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When they breathe their last, they return to the earth; And... their thoughts perish.” The psalmist is urging us to choose life, “Happy are they... whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth... who keeps promises forever; who gives justice to those who are oppressed; and food to those who hunger; sets the captive free; opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; ...cares for the stranger; ... sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.” Our psalm is one of the “Hallelujah” psalms because they all start and end with “Hallelujah” and praise God. They remind us not to put our trust in mortals, in whom there is no help. These psalms remind us that God is our Creator Father, our Redeemer and Savior, and our Comforter and Advocate. We know God is love and God is with us, and, like the psalmist, we can’t help but proclaim, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live...” God will not let us down! God is with us! “Praise God in his sanctuary... Praise him for his acts of power... Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet... praise him with timbrel and dancing... praise him with the clash of cymbals... Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah!” As the psalm declares, God is eternal; God is immortal. Kings and Presidents are mortal and, ultimately, they perish. So, in such times as this, we come to worship this Almighty God who brings light and hope to make darkness vanish away. We are gathered in and together to eat and drink the bread and wine of compassion and be nourished to proclaim hope and bring light into the darkness. We sing a hymn for Almighty God to empower us to have the courage to live out His call to heal our broken world. Gather us in, Lord!