Liturgist Readings Sunday September 25, 2016

*The reading this morning from 1Timothy introduces a new factor which Timothy is called to be aware of in his own life. This is the idea that it can be easy to be drawn away from one’s spiritual journey by the pursuit of wealth in this world. Paul reminds Timothy that this life on earth is fleeting and our focus needs to be in living a life as God intends. Using the metaphor of an athletic race Paul is challenging Timothy to keep his head down, focused on the finish line, running a race always towards God. Paul finishes these passages emphasizing the fleeting nature of today wealth and the eternal love of God, which is wealth beyond measure.*

1 Timothy 6:6-19

6A devout life does bring wealth, but it’s the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. 7Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, 8if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that’s enough.

9But if it’s only money these leaders are after, they’ll self-destruct in no time. 10Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.

11But you, Timothy, man of God: Run for your life from all this. Pursue a righteous life—a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy. 12Run hard and fast in the faith. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to, the life you so fervently embraced in the presence of so many witnesses.

13I’m charging you before the life-giving God and before Christ, who took his stand before Pontius Pilate and didn’t give an inch: 14Keep this command to the letter, and don’t slack off. Our Master, Jesus Christ, is on his way. 15He’ll show up right on time, his arrival guaranteed by the Blessed and Undisputed Ruler, High King, High God. 16He’s the only one death can’t touch, his light so bright no one can get close. He’s never been seen by human eyes—human eyes can’t take him in! Honor to him, and eternal rule! Oh, yes.

17Tell those rich in this world’s wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage— 18to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. 19If they do that, they’ll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life.

*The story of Lazarus from Luke chapter 16 also speaks to the love of wealth, but also the idea of what one sees in the world. The wealthy man spent his life acquiring wealth for himself and in doing so did not see anything else in the world then what he himself, or his family, needed. Lazarus on the other hand had no wealth and out of necessity, as it was all that was keeping him alive, was aware of the wealthy man. It was only after their death did the wealthy man actually come to see Lazarus and only then because he himself was suffering. In this story we are called to embody the scriptures in all that we do each and every day of our lives.*

Luke 16:19-31

19“There once was a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption. 20A poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, had been dumped on his doorstep. 21All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man’s table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores.

22“Then he died, this poor man, and was taken up by the angels to the lap of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23In hell and in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the distance and Lazarus in his lap. 24He called out, ‘Father Abraham, mercy! Have mercy! Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I’m in agony in this fire.’

25“But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that in your lifetime you got the good things and Lazarus the bad things. It’s not like that here. Here he’s consoled and you’re tormented. 26Besides, in all these matters there is a huge chasm set between us so that no one can go from us to you even if he wanted to, nor can anyone cross over from you to us.’

27“The rich man said, ‘Then let me ask you, Father: Send him to the house of my father 28where I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them so they won’t end up here in this place of torment.’

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church

**Thanks be to God**

**Sermon Sunday September 25th 2016**

So I would like to tell you the story of Sophie and Barney. Now Sophie and Barney live down in Kingston, Ontario with a friend of mine, Phil, and although I only met them both for the first time this summer they made me feel so welcome and like one of the family. It is interesting because Sophie and Barney do this quite often, be welcoming that is, they do it with almost everyone they meet. I was amazed at how excited they were to finally meet me, now I had heard about them for quite a while, but only on my way back from school did I have the opportunity to meet them.

I can imagine that many of you have had similar experiences where you meet and the other is so excited to see you, so excited to meet you, it is almost like you are their entire world. That is what it was like with Sophie and Barney.

So to be completely honest I should give you a bit more information about Sophie and Barney. You see Sophie is a 65lb English bulldog and Barney is this tiny 5lb Shitzu cross. Sitting on the sofa after meeting them, they were all over me, even the 65lb Sophie, who thought it would be a great idea to crawl up on my lap because you just know that she is a lap dog? How many of us have had experiences with animals where they demand a physical manifestation of our affection for them. Many of you know that we have two cats at home and the little one Tony is rather aloof at times but when he wants affection, he just climbs on top of you and demands that you scratch his little head. The other day as he was climbing on my lap I had my hand stretched out and the takes his little paw and places it on the top of my finger in such a way that my finger actually sits right inside his paw between the pads…..it as almost like he wanted to hold my hand.

In 1991 Boston heavy metal rock band Extreme surprised the music world when they released a song that had one acoustic guitar and two voices. In the midst of that years pop and rock music this quiet song ended up as number 1 on the Billboard Top 100. I have always enjoyed this song and I think it speaks to what I am talking about this morning.

Saying I love you

Is not the words I want to hear from you

It's not that I want you

Not to say, but if you only knew

How easy it would be to show me how you feel

More than words is all you have to do to make it real

Then you wouldn't have to say that you love me

'Cause I'd already know

What do these stories have to do with what the scriptures are today?

What these all tell me is that there is something that we as Christians might want to really consider.

When you have a pet, how many of us stand there and look at our pet and tell them how much we love them, now to be honest we probably all do that, but what they really want and need is a physical expression of that love. How many of you had the pleasure of meeting Sharon’s pup Baillie? Once she met you she would come to you and force her nose and head under your hand, so you could pet her. It was non-stop, but it was sweet. Pets don’t need the words, they need the expression.

When I think about the song it speaks to the same thing. There is a line that says; “What would you say if I took those words away, Then you couldn't make things new, Just by saying I love you. What would happen to us if we took away all the words to express how we feel? What if we took the words away that would let us express what we believe, our faith? How would we express that.

In today’s reading from 1Timothy I see that Paul is talking about something much like this. He is asking what beliefs does Timothy embody, what does he live out in his world? Does he live out the belief that what we own is what makes us who we are, so we need to keep getting more and bigger, or does he live out his understanding of a God of love, compassion, and grace. Paul is challenging those who are reading this letter that what really matters is how we embody what we believe in the world, and that is just as important for us today as it was for the people of Paul’s time.

In the Worship Choir’s anthem this morning you will hear the line, “All I once held dear, built my life upon, all this world revers” how we have lived our lives, embodying what the world thinks is important, is nothing compared to knowing Jesus. In the knowing of Jesus we come to see that we are to use Jesus as our guide in this world, our guide on how we are called to live, what we are called to embody.

There have been a number of conversations around Windsor Park United church in the past few months and many of them have come down to asking ourselves one, what seems like simple question. We have been asking why? Why do we gather? Why do we come? I will be the first one to admit that these might actually be challenging questions, but they lead to many other thoughts and that is not a bad thing.

There are many reasons to come to this place. We come to spend time in a community of love and support. We come to hear music and to enter into a sacred in worship. We come to worship God. But I hope that we also come because we know that in some ways this place and what happens here will help us to go out into the world each week to truly embody what we believe. It is almost like hitting the gas station at the beginning of the week, so that we can enter the world as God’s people. As we will again hear in the anthem, “Knowing you Jesus, there is no greater thing.” Because as we come to know Jesus, we can come to emulate Jesus in the world, embody the love, compassion, and hope of Jesus for a world that too often can be cynical. When we enter this world renewed from out time together, embodying Christ in the world we begin to see “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” we begin to see all of creation as being from God, even those places of struggle.

I can only imagine how we might be able to really change the world if we were to enter every day physically embodying what we say we believe. John O’Keefe who writes the blog “The Naked Jesus puts it this way, “I have come to the conclusion that people claiming to be followes of Jesus user prayers in a few ways:…you see people in your community standing with a sign that reads, “Need Food.” You think to yourself, ‘I prayed for those in need this morning, I hope someone helps.” Let me say, in reality I have nothing against prayer-we should be praying. We should always be going to the Divine for guidance and grace; it’s a good thing….But, if you are praying for something, are you involved in what you are praying for? If you are praying to end hunger, are you feeding the hungry? If you are praying to end poverty, are you helping the poor? If you are praying for social justice, are you a voice for social justice?”

I think what he is getting at here is that we are challenged by our faith to truly embody what we believe. Now I am the first one to recognize all of the amazing things that this community does for those around us who are marginalized. But I wonder what would happen if this place was not the place that renewed and challenged each of us to live out our faith, to truly embody our faith each and every day. Who would we be?

It is a challenge, but who will you embody today, tomorrow, and the next day? Will you be sent out embodying Christ in the world, or will you embody what the world thinks we need to be? It is up to each of us to decide and then to figure out how will we live that out each and every day.

**Amen.**