

**November 9, 2014**

**1 Timothy 6:17-18; “Be Rich”**

**This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace be with all of you.

We are in our two week stewardship series titled ‘Be Rich’. The goal of this series is to help us define, and live out, what it means to be rich as people richly blessed by God. Our theme verse is based on these words from the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.” Last week, Pastor Sarah kicked it off with the theme by addressing what it means to be rich. She addressed our distorted perception of what it means to be rich while and giving us three P’s for being rich through giving. Giving that is a priority, a percentage of our income and is progressive over time.

I’m wrapping up this series today with this question, “What does it mean to be rich towards God?” My goal is to help us see how the power of awareness influences how we regard God’s blessings on our lives. Those blessings inform how we live and what we give to our relationships, our community and to the mission and ministries of this church known as Trinity.

First off, have you ever went grocery shopping with the intent of buying only a single item, or just a few items and arrive at the check out line with far more than you set out to buy? You cruise the aisles, you see something, and in less time than it takes to take it off the shelf, you convince yourself that it is something you actually need. Our brains skip right over want and go to need. When I tell my wife that I’ll go to the store for just a few things, I sometimes brings home more than planned. “Sure, we need another package of cookies. Hey, that’s a good price for that.” It’s as though I have a small sense of amnesia and forget what we have at home when I go to the grocery store for just a few things.

That is the power of awareness where seeing is needing. For our lives, awareness is critical in sales and marketing. Without it, and the discontentment it enflames, consumers don’t buy as much. Apart from a daily dose of discontentment, we’d be perfectly happy with the stuff we already own. That is why manufacturers and their advertising agencies keep a close eye on brand awareness.

Years ago, discontentment didn’t play as a big a role in purchases as it does today. Prior to today’s sophisticated advertising through every electronic medium, people bought based on one thing. They spent their money for one reason: need. Imagine such a thing. They would replace something when it broke. How passe! Today, we don’t replace things when they break. We replace things when the newer model of the thing we already own becomes available. We upgrade. And when do we upgrade? When we become aware that the upgrade is available. We may see someone using his upgraded phone, cooking on his upgraded stovetop, or looking great in her upgraded wardrobe.

Once we are aware that the products are out there, we start scheming. Once we become aware of what we don’t have, we become unhappy; discouraged that life could be better. Thing is, for all of us, awareness can work against us or it can work for us.

It was this topic that the Apostle Paul was addressing in his letter to Timothy. Timothy was a young man who was a leader and teacher in his local church in Ephesus after Paul left there. Timothy was facing many false teachers and Paul is seeking to give Timothy encouragement. This encouragement was for young people to hold to their faith in Jesus Christ: his life, death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection. With that faith came the conviction, the central thrust of the Christian message reflected in how Jesus live: to live

faithfully with the awareness of God's blessings on your life and to share those blessings to bring God's kingdom into our world.

Paul's words are convicting: "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."

Paul is saying that we may be aware of what others have and what we have. In actuality, when we look at our lives honestly, our health, our abilities, our relationships, our material goods...everything is a gift from God. It is God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Rather than upgrade and have more, isn't it true that when we are aware of God's blessings...our lives are wonderful?

The key thing here is that it requires no discipline or effort on our part to be made aware of what we don't have or could have. Culture will take care of that. But as Christians, people who believe in Jesus Christ, it is our responsibility to follow his example by taking the initiative to be aware of God's blessings on our lives and to share them in blessings others to the glory of God.

Every spending and saving decision we make is made within a framework of awareness. To be good at being rich, we must broaden that framework. To make it a habit to see the needs in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our world. If we don't, eventually our awareness will be limited to our individual experiences. While we remain rich, we will no longer be rich in good deeds. We will no longer feel compelled to share. Seeing will become needing because we will have lost our awareness of what it means to be in need.

So, Paul says: "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share."

In light of such guiding words, what should we do? How does this intersect with our lives? This is where our mission of the local church is to be aware, and help all of us be aware, of God's goodness on our lives that together we can bring God's kingdom into our world.

I love my role as pastor because I see you, as a congregation, living this out. Just so you are aware, here's a few highlights of what we have done together in 2014:

1) Our Noah's Ark is a faith-based preschool that nurtures young minds through activities, learning and incorporating Bible stories in the curriculum. 88 children are enrolled this year. You have helped support one of the best preschools in our city.

2) Our quilters made 193 quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Those quilts will be shipped around the world to provide warmth for many in poverty. You helped support our quilters.

3) Our Food Pantry is the second largest in our county. 90 volunteers provide food for nearly 1,000 families a month! You are helping feed the hungry in our community.

4) Our Friends of Flynn ministry provides weekend meals, healthy snacks, socks and underwear, school supplies, books, boots for children in need. You are helping children succeed in school.

5) Our international ministry with our partners in Jamaica began in 1998. Since then, homes have been built, school supplies and household items have been distributed to those living in tin shacks. At the Jabneh Christian Academy, you provide money to build two classroom building, bathrooms for the children and playground equipment. \$10,000 was given to buy additional property for the school.

6) Since we're in November, last year in 2013 we served nearly 400 people at our Community Thanksgiving Dinner. That was nearly double the amount from 2012.

In 2010, Trinity members were asked to complete a congregation assessment survey. We worked with a consultant named Russ Crabtree. He shared the following based on the survey results: “You are a church with tremendous strengths. These are strengths I don’t see at 95% of the churches across the USA.”

We seek to ‘Be Rich’ as a congregation and be aware, and address, the needs of many in our congregation, community and our world. As we draw to the end of 2014, we are planning for 2015 and a part of that planning is our financial ministry plan.

Some do not like talking about financially contributing to the local church. They may have had a bad experience when a pastor did one of three things: begged, berated or bribed people to give. “You need to give or we’ll have to turn out the lights to save money. You haven’t given so you better step it up. If you give God \$10, he’ll bless you with \$100.”

But actuality, you’re not giving to the church. You’re not giving to God. Those two statements are just a myth.

As a Christian, living with an awareness of the richness of God on your life leads you to generously share in order to spread God’s kingdom in our world.

This week, you’ll receive a card that looks like this along with a letter. I invite you, you and your spouse to consider what you are willing to financially give and to share in order to support the work of God through your local church. For some, completing this card is something you have done for years. For others, writing down and committing to a certain dollar amount seems odd since given to quick appeals is more enticing. Appeals are great though financially supporting the church on a regular basis is an act of faith and allows the mission of the church to move forward with strength. To make it easy, and many of you do banking and buying on-line, you can set-up automatic withdrawals from your bank account. My wife and I do this-we don’t even think about it every week.

The Apostle Paul said, “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share.” Imagine what we could do together for the glory of God in 2015. The lives that are restored, relationships empowered, God’s presence real in tangible ways. All through worship, learning and sharing.

I’m grateful for your gifts that have done marvelous ministry in 2014. I’m thrilled at what we can do in 2015. So, let’s complete the commitment card and join together as a strong congregation. Let’s Be Rich!

