

Both of our new testament readings today deal with the topic of wealth. Having wealth and wanting wealth.

Paul talks about the desiring for wealth, telling us that the love of money

is a root of all kinds of evil,

and eagerness to be rich

can cause us to wander away from faith.

In the Gospel of Luke,

Jesus tells a parable about an extremely wealthy man

who does nothing to help Lazarus,

the poor man living in the dirt outside his own gate.

The rich man spends eternity in hell while Lazarus goes to heaven.

These seem like pretty clear messages, but are they directed at us?

Are we the wealthy man in Jesus's parable?

If we don't see ourselves as wealthy this morning, then we can feel pretty good about God's message today.

We are on the right side of this week's teachings.

Yeah!

So, you rich folks need to watch yourselves!

And

Give us poor folks some of your stuff!

However, **Paul tells us**

that we should be satisfied

with just food and clothing,

Just food and clothing.

He does not mention the new **I-Watch**

or the **F-150**,

glossy white, v6, 4x4, 10 speed transmission . . .

Or, let's face it,

even a stripped down **Ford Focus**.

No, Paul tells us that we should be content with **food and clothing**.

If anything beyond food and clothing is extra,

I get the uncomfortable feeling

that we all **qualify as wealthy**

even though we probably don't see ourselves as rich.

Wealthy is, afterall, a **relative term**.

I never thought of myself as wealthy growing up.

My **parents were constantly talking** as though we were one wasteful choice
away from living on the streets.

But then, a few years ago in a previous parish,

I led a youth group on a **medical mission** trip to Honduras.

This was a trip that brought doctors and nurses to a small village

while those of us with lesser skills built stoves out of clay.

I can't ever remember **being so hot** . . . and I was raised in Florida!

But, of course,

in Florida,

we had air conditioning –

something not even dreamt of in the village in Honduras.

The heat and the mosquitoes

were a constant,

miserable backdrop

to the greater suffering of the people we came to help.

When the word got out

that doctors were there to provide free medical care,

people came to the village from all over,

walking miles,

carrying sick children.

I saw families arrive

and set up little camps where they would wait for the clinic to open.

They **took our discarded cardboard** boxes

that had held medical supplies

and flattened them and

then fit them together

to **make little shelters**

they huddled under when it rained.

As I watched them

I realized that I was **unimaginably wealthy** compared to these people.

This was true poverty.

Then, we ran out of **cardboard**

I watched a **mother**

hold her body over her sick child,

trying to keep the rain off her face.

I was glimpsing

someone who had less than the people in the cardboard shelters.

At home, I tended to think of myself as not having much.

Everyone around me always had a better car, the newest gadget.

I actually thought I was poor.

Now, I knew

I was insanely, unimaginably wealthy.

With my kind of wealth, I was who Jesus was talking about.

I know there are people with far more than I have,

but when I compare myself to that mother in the rain,

I realize that I never fear going without food

or medical care for my children.

I do not question the water I drink

I don't worry that soldiers will break down my door and kill me.

I really am wealthy.

But when I got home to Baltimore,

it was not long before I went back to being discontent
with what I had.

Modern life does not make it easy to be content with what we have.

The **economy depends on us wanting more**,
something better,
the newest fad.

And once we have that,

The thing depends on **us becoming quickly discontent** with it and looking for something better.

Our need to attain more pushes us to make more money,
work longer hours,
spend less time at home or at church.

It leaves us stressed out,
burned out,
with no energy or attention for what matters.

Even so, this is a hard treadmill to jump off of.

It is in **our very nature** to strive for more.

In the early history of humans, this striving is what kept us alive.

Without it, **cave men would not have had the courage**

to go after big game

with just a spear

or the fortitude

to trek across long distances in search of better land.

But this instinctive urge

to get the next thing

is also what keeps us dissatisfied with our current state

no matter how much we have already.

BREAK

Paul tells us ***There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.***

Notice that Paul

does not

say there is great gain in godliness

combined with joy or happiness.

He uses what seems like a **lesser emotion - contentment**.

Joy and rejoicing are great,... but **a little exhausting**.

When we are experiencing joy, our minds cannot focus on much else.

The birth of a baby, falling in love - these joyful moments leave little of our attention for anything outside of the moment.

But in contentment we are peaceful,

We are calm and in charge of ourselves.

We are free of yearning for more

and free of rejoicing in getting more.

When we are content,

we are,

As some say, **living in the moment,**

When we are content, we are able to know God's peace which surpasses understanding.

When we are without the endless distraction of getting stuff, we are able to notice the needs of those around us.

The parable Jesus tells

alludes to the distracted way the rich man lives his life,

dressed in purple and fine linen and feasting sumptuously every day.

The rich man

seems to be unaware

of the starving, sore-covered Lazarus right outside his gates.

His mind is on what he has

and what he wants,
leaving little room for the poor
like Lazarus.

The rich man seems to come from **a whole lifestyle of not paying attention**
because
when the rich man asks
that **his 5 brothers be warned** about ending up in hell,
Father Abraham tells him that **such a warning will do no good.**

These brothers have **not listened to Moses**
and all the prophets
and are unlikely to pay much attention to a new warning
– even from a man who came back from the dead.

They are consumed with their wealth and the pursuit of more wealth.

This does not sound like contentment.

Maybe

it is not the wealth itself

that we are being warned against.

Maybe,

It is the inability to give our whole hearts and minds to God

and doing God's work

because

we are consumed with thoughts of more.

What is it that we long for?

Are we finding it at Wal Mart or on Amazon?

Does the **thrill of the arrival of a new package** last beyond the opening of it?

Considering

how much time and energy we give

to the pursuit of money and what it can buy,

it is remarkable how little satisfaction it brings us.

Every one of us here lives far better

than people ever have in our history,

yet our contentment is no greater.

Maybe

the hole we are trying to fill

cannot be filled

It cannot be filled with what we can buy.

It will never be filled with luxury.

It is **a hole that only God can fill.**

