

“More Wealthy Than You Know”
Matthew 6:9-13, 1 Timothy 6:17-19

As you listen to the stories of the Bible, you'll notice that God often asks people to do some **weird stuff**. This morning, our Children's Chime group did a little skit about Noah. In that story, God asks Noah to build a large ship on dry land. That was weird. Thankfully, it's not the kind of command that any of us are likely to receive. Our readings today, however, present us with instructions that do apply to us, and which are definitely weird in their own way. Their strangeness comes from the fact that they ask us to live by a different set of assumptions and priorities than those that are dominant in our culture.

In our first reading, Jesus teaches us how to pray. This isn't intended to be merely a formal prayer that we say each week in a worship service. It is to be our daily prayer – the prayer of our hearts and the essence of our relationship with God. As the fundamental expression of our connection with God, this **daily prayer** includes the request for our **daily bread**. “*Give us this day our daily bread,*” we are to pray. How many times have we prayed this in worship? And yet, as often as we may have said the prayer, we may not have noticed that it a prayer radically at odds with the conventional wisdom of our society and the ways of the world. It is a prayer of contentment and trust. “Don't worry about the future,” Jesus tells us. Focus instead on taking each day as it comes, trusting that what God provides will be enough. It's not an easy prayer to pray, when you think about it. It calls us to a change of heart about what we truly need to live a good life, and invites us to reevaluate our concept of what really makes us wealthy. The idea is that, if we have what we need to get through each day, we are doing pretty well. In fact we are as wealthy as we need to be. As a consequence, the Lord's Prayer is especially difficult to say when we have something to lose: for those of us who have jobs, retirement plans, investments or property. Whether we would classify ourselves as wealthy by worldly standards or not, if you've got more than you need for each day, then according to Scripture, you're already rich. Congratulations! But with this wealth comes responsibility.

Our reading from first Timothy gives us our first responsibility, which is to **rely on God**. Concerning those of us who, by virtue of having more than enough, are rich in God's sight, the author says “*command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God...*” In all honesty, if we have any resources at all, our natural tendency is going to be to place our primary trust in those resources. We may indeed have a measure of faith in God and feel secure in that. But when the medical bills start rolling in and you struggle to pay them, or when you see your stock portfolio take a nose dive, or when the job you depended on disappears, your may find that you don't have as much faith as you thought. Panic may set in. You may find yourself overwhelmed with worry. You may even feel like you've failed because of your financial trouble. But the Bible tells us that our true hope, and the true measure of our success in life, is not to be found in our material wealth. Worship services in our Presbyterian tradition have often begun with a scripture that proclaims the real truth: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Sure, there are going to be times when we struggle financially. Maybe that will be most of the time or even all of the time. But that doesn't change our value as children of God, it doesn't change our eternal destiny, and it doesn't make us any less successful in God's eyes. In fact, for many people, including myself, the times of greatest struggle have turned out to be the times when God has felt the most real and present. When you've got nothing else to cling to, you are free to cling to God! The goal of life isn't to accumulate stuff anyway, it is to be in relationship

with God and to reflect Christ in the way we live. No matter what happens: no matter how much or how little you may have, if you remember to rely on God, one day at a time, you are on the right track.

As we rely on God, we encounter our second responsibility: **Focus on people.** The author of 1 Timothy tells us to *“be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share...”* Just as we are truly wealthy when we trust in God and have what we need for each day, we add value to our lives by investing in other people. When we are generous towards others, whether that generosity is financial, or a generosity of spirit that involves sharing, forgiveness, grace and understanding, our lives are enriched. You might say that our souls grow larger, and we become more like Jesus, who certainly invested his life in people. One of the benefits of my job is that I get to see this happen in people’s lives. Something wonderful happens when people, who are almost always broken and struggling in some aspect of their own lives, reach beyond themselves to offer care, comfort or aid to another. It’s not necessarily a tangible value, but there is a spiritual beauty and an experience of God’s presence in such occasions that is truly awesome. The counter-intuitive wisdom of Scripture is that our wealth is enhanced when we focus on helping other people rather than on protecting what we have. Remember, if you’ve got your daily bread, you’ve got enough to share, and when you share, you experience God’s blessing.

The Apostle concludes by urging us to accept this guidance in order that we might experience **real life.** We’re told to *“take hold of the life that really is life.”* No matter what your age, or your stage of life; whether you live in a million-dollar home, or can barely pay your rent – you can have the best that this life has to offer. By taking each day as it comes, relying on God to provide for our needs, and investing in other people, we become free to live with a vibrant sense of God’s presence, to experience God’s Spirit at work in our relationships, and to become all that God has created us to be. Think about your life. To what extent do you rely on your stuff, and to what extent do you rely on God? In what are you investing your energy – in protecting what you’ve got, or in sharing what God has given you? Are you experiencing the dynamic power and grace of God and really living, or are you just marking time? If you are a parent, what are you teaching your children? Jesus calls us to a life of radical trust in God and service to others. These aren’t the values of our society. To live the way of Jesus can seem weird. But Jesus promises us that when we live his way, we will be truly wealthy and fully blessed, and have the best that life has to offer – now and forever.