

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 28, 2025**

**“We Will Be Content”
I Timothy 6:6-19**

The Rev. Dr. David Clark

St. Paul writes: “there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these” (vv. 6-8).

We live era of great discontent; so Paul’s invitation to a life of contentment, it captures our attention because it sounds unlike anything we hear anywhere else. What would it look like, what would it mean, what would it feel like—to enjoy this kind of contentment?

In our Epistle Lesson, Paul contrasts contentment with the desire for wealth. He writes, “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” (vv. 9-10).

Notice, his warning about desiring wealth—the way Paul puts it—this is very often misquoted. Paul is sometimes misquoted as saying ‘money is the root of all evil’; rather, Paul warns about ‘the love of money.’ Paul isn’t warning about the ills of money itself; in fact, later in the letter Paul gives guidance and advice to wealthy Christians, on how to make proper (and generous) use of their wealth (vv. 17-19; cf. Reddish). Paul isn’t disparaging money; he’s warning about a kind of covetous desire, an infatuation with money—which he says pulls us away from faith, away from trust in God. As Paul cautions the wealthy, do “not [...] set [your] hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God” (v. 17).

So Paul warns against loving money, yet also—as an alternative to that infatuation with money, Paul invites us to reflect on a life of contentment: “if we have food and clothing,” if we have the necessities of our life, he says “we will be content with these” (v. 8). In the original language, the word for ‘contentment’ here (αὐτάρκεια) is about being self-sufficient—not in the sense of hoarding to the point of not needing support from others (cf. Luke 12:13-21); rather, this is about satisfaction with what we have, ‘a mind contented with its lot’ (Thayers). Or, in the words of the singer-songwriter Sheryl Crow, “It’s not having what you want / It’s wanting what you’ve got.”

Now this isn’t the only place that Paul speaks about contentment. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote: “I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (vv. 11-13). But in our Epistle Lesson this morning, Paul speaks of contentment from a different perspective, saying: “for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it” (v. 7; cf. Job 1:21, Ecclesiastes 5:15). As Paul reminds us of the impermanence of possessions, he also invites us into a different way of living.

This is Paul’s invitation into the Christian virtue and practice of simplicity. Richard Foster, a Christian author from the Quaker tradition, has written a great deal about simplicity in the Christian life—what it is and what means. According to Foster, simplicity in the Christian life doesn’t begin with financial decisions or purchases; rather, it begins deeper within our spiritual life before God. He writes, “The Christian Discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward life-style.”

According to Foster, the life of simplicity does mean rejecting all worldly goods and possessions; not at all. Rather, it’s about prioritizing the reign of God. Reflecting on Christ’s call to “seek first the kingdom of God” (NKJV), Foster writes: “The central point for the Discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of his kingdom first and then everything necessarily

will come in its proper order.” In this way, he adds, “Simplicity sets possessions in proper perspective.” When God, and the kingdom of God, and the love of God, find their faithful place at the centre of life, we may be liberated from the lie that we are what we own.

And instead, Foster writes, we will begin to see possessions not as an alternative to God, not as a “distraction from a life lived with God” (Ferguson), but as gifts lent to us by God. He writes: “Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God.” “To receive what we have as a gift from God is the first inner attitude of simplicity.” Instead of “crav[ing] things we neither need nor enjoy,” he says, “Simplicity [...] reorients our lives so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us.”

And then—as we prize the kingdom of God above our possessions—our habits and behaviours will change. Foster writes: “To experience the liberating spirit of simplicity will affect how we live.” “Simplicity,” he says, “sets us free to receive the provision of God as a gift that is not ours to keep and can be freely shared with others.” “We cease from showy extravagance not on the grounds of being unable to afford it, but on the grounds of principle.” We “buy things for their usefulness rather than their status [...], their utility, not their prestige.” We “shun anything that distracts [us] from seeking first the kingdom of God.”

Now doesn't that sound delightful and inviting; doesn't that sound, well, like contentment? And yet, this is not easy; pursuing simplicity is not easy. And the truth is, we don't make it easy for each other. Never mind for a moment that advertising is designed to make us discontent with what we have, and make us think we'll be happier if we buy more; that's obvious. But even aside from advertising, we can do plenty of damage by diminishing one another's contentment or questioning decisions based in simplicity.

I heard a sermon many years ago in which the minister spoke of those who rob us of contentment by pointing out the things we lack. I can remember well how the minister illustrated this—and keep in mind, this was in the early 2000s when I heard this sermon. He said, “All you have to do is turn on your laptop before

someone says, ‘Oh, I see you’re still using Windows 98?’ And,” he said, “their tone of voice is so shocked you’d think they’d found you trying to start a fire by rubbing two sticks together!”

Twenty years later, I think it’s only worse—this tendency in society to point out and question why we don’t have the newest technology or the newest whatever. We had to take our phones into store a couple of years ago, and—when we arrived—the employee asked what model of phones we had; when we told him, he said, “Oh no, that can’t be; you must be mistaken.” When we showed him, and confirmed the advanced age of our devices, he looked at our phones like they had come from an archeological dig; he was about ready to send them out for carbon dating!

Sometimes others do this to us; but, if we’re honest, we should recognize that we do it to others, too: little thoughtless comments we make to others, comments that question what others have (or don’t have), or the hobbies they pursue (or don’t pursue). It could be simply making the assumption that someone else flies somewhere for their vacation, or presuming that they can afford to participate in some expensive hobby.

Yet against all that—we need to recognize that simplicity is not a failing, but a way of life that makes space for, in Paul’s words, “godliness combined with contentment.” Because contentment is ultimately not about being satisfied with little; not at all! Contentment is about recognizing that we are, by the grace of God, already overflowing with an abundance of blessings; even apart from any material possessions, we are rich in blessings—the knowledge and love of God, the mercy and kindness of Christ, the company and comfort of the Holy Spirit. To be content with the overflowing blessings of God—that’s contentment; that’s the gift. To be content with simplicity—that’s the gift. As the old Shaker hymn puts it, so beautifully and so simply:

“’Tis the gift to be simple, ’tis the gift to be free
'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right

'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed
To turn, turn will be our delight
'Till by turning, turning we come round right." Amen.