

Sermon - 09/25/22
Ps 91; Jer 32:1-3a, 6-15;
1 Tim 6:6-19; Lu 16:19-31
Take Hold of Life

We have followed our weeping prophet, Jeremiah for some weeks now. The Lord gave him a tough and thankless job. He was sent to warn his people that their love affair with foreign gods would end in destruction. Judah was conquered, humiliated, and hauled off into slavery. The siege of Jerusalem was horrible – lasting almost two years. The city's water supply was sabotaged, the food supply was cut off and a starved and weakened people could not resist the Babylonian army's attack.

Toward the end, there were plots, betrayals, and desperate politics. The temple officials hated Jeremiah and tried to murder him, but he was not harmed by the invading commanders. He was finally abducted and taken to Egypt, and we hear no more of him. But the Lord spoke to him before he was forced to leave. King Zedekiah had put him in prison. His kinsman, Shallum came to him and offered a piece of ancestral land to him – his to buy as an inheritance. This would seem like selling land that was about to be flooded by a dam, or land contaminated by industrial waste in our time. Who would do it? Who would buy land in a conquered nation? The Prophet Jeremiah wrote fifty-two chapters of warnings and promises in tears and agony. But that day the Lord spoke to Jeremiah's heart: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land," says the Lord. Assurance of God's power and God's love for Judah and for Jeremiah. God is saying, "Take hold of this life I have given you! Hope in Me, for I will vindicate you – you will live!" I imagine Jeremiah was encouraged by God's Word to him, even in the chaos and destruction of that war.

Life is a gift. The commission and anointing for Gospel ministry are also gifts. We need to encourage one another – and say yes to the strength and inspiration God gives us. This life – ***eternal life*** – is ours through Jesus Christ. The Bible says He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34). He offers abundant, eternal life to anyone who believes Him and trusts Him for everything. Have you told somebody about how wonderful Jesus is – only to have him/her resist or contradict you? I just want to say to such persons, "It's here, right here – go on and take hold of – the purpose and meaning of life in Christ!"

Today you and I are listening in on Paul's encouraging letter to Timothy. We are free to soak up all the strength and inspiration we can – to draw more life from the message of this letter. Timothy came from a Christian family – at least on his mother's side. He stepped up when he heard Paul preach in Lystra. Afterward, he traveled with Paul's ministry team. Paul often sent him to quell arguments and establish order in various churches: Thessalonica, Ephesus and Corinth. He was much younger than the others, and his health was not dependable. But he must have had a winning way with prickly people.

We don't get to hear Timothy's voice in this writing, but we can suppose that the things Paul speaks about are on the younger man's mind. Paul urges Timothy to be content with the basics, and to counsel members of the congregation to be content. He gives the forceful warning about making wealth a life goal. Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus brings that lesson home in a very plain and painful way.

Instead of false wealth, Paul urges Timothy and us to pursue real treasure: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness (v 11). Then, Paul tells him (again) to "fight the good fight of the faith." What is the good fight? The world's current runs with a strong undertow – a wide stream. But you and I are not headed down the river – we're headed upstream. Pay attention to the stresses! Pray at all times! Jesus holds you steady and calm – and you, even you can reach out to those who are being overcome by the forces of the world.

Later, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul is in prison in Rome and knows his earthly life is coming to an end. Emperor Nero will have him executed. He tells Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Tim 4:7)

(Continued on next page.)

You and I draw ***more life*** from Jeremiah's story of struggle! We breathe in more of the Holy Spirit, the breath of God from the Apostle Paul's encouragement.

It is right here, right now – right in front of you! Take hold of this amazing, brilliant, real life – this eternal life. When you go from here today, carry it in your heart as your finest treasure – and share it with everyone you can. Amen.