



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

October 7, 2007

19th Sunday after Pentecost

1 Timothy 6:6-16

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Amos 6:1-7

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 146

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

God Wants All to be Saved

When is the last time you were in a good knock down, drag 'em out, no holds barred fight? Not just a discussion. Not just a verbal fight, but a no holds barred fight. I have been in one fist fight in my entire life. I was in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade, and some kid that went to the area high school, I think he was a Sophomore but he actually should have graduated the year before, came up to me at the bus stop at the high school and said, "Leave my girlfriend alone." I had no clue. Then he dropped me with one punch, broke my glasses and walked off with two of his friends by his side. So it wasn't really a fist fight I was in. It was a fist reception I was in.

But I have been in a fight every day of my life. So have you. Do you remember the last battle? Was it this morning? "Should I hit snooze again and roll over, or should I get up and go to church?" "Should I keep working because I have stuff I have to get done today, or should I go to church?" Was it last night? "Should I have one more drink or have I had enough already?" Was it this morning? "If I put that much in my envelope, I won't have enough for myself this week."

Every day of your life you are fighting the fight of faith. This morning our God comes to us with some good advice and direction and some promises for us as we fight the fight of faith. He tells us first of all to recognize who the enemy is and then secondly, he tells us to recognize where our strength is. To be perfectly honest with you, I think sometimes we mix the two up. We think our real enemy is our strength.

Remember that we have been looking at 1 Timothy for a couple of weeks now. Paul is writing to Timothy, the young pastor who now has this congregation, giving him some advice, some encouragement, some trustworthy statements on which to hang his hat as he carries out his ministry. Now he tells him, "fight the good fight of faith, and as you fight it, recognize some of these specific traps of Satan." He says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. You brought nothing into the world and you can't take anything with you, but if you have food and clothing, be content with it. Don't get caught up in the trap of the love of money." That is the specific thing he talks about as he talks about recognizing your enemy this morning.

That passage that was read to you from 1 Timothy is probably one of the most misquoted passages from Scriptures. You have probably heard people say, "Money is the root of all evil." Maybe you have even said it. God never, ever says that. He didn't say it in what we read if you look closely. And he can't say it because the earth is the

Lord's and everything in it is what Psalm 24 says, right? Money cannot be evil because money is the Lord's, possessions are the Lord's, things are the Lord's.

But he says that the love of money, anything that you love more than God becomes sinful. It doesn't mean it is evil in and of itself. Where is the problem? The problem is you. When you or I love money or anything else more than we love God, it's not the object of our affection that is the problem, it's us. We have the problem.

What did you learn in confirmation class? Three enemies right?—the devil, the world and our flesh. But in reality, I would offer to say that our biggest enemy is ourselves because the devil can't separate us from God. God has said that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, neither angels nor demons, neither present nor future, nor anything else; as long as we keep turning to God, nothing can separate us from him. That includes the world.

But my greatest enemy, the enemy that can undermine me the most, I would say is myself. Either I am going to turn to God, or I am going to turn away from God. Either I am going to love God, or I am going to love something else. In this case, he is talking about money.

Flip Wilson used to say, "The devil made me do it," and sometimes we want to echo that as though it's not our fault. It is our fault. We are the enemy that we battle against very often. Are there other forces that are against us? Most certainly, but you and I are Christians who believed that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place. You and I who believe God's promises, "never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"—you and I who believe that God has said "all things work together for the good of those who love him" either can go to those promises or go to something else after we are believers. This morning he warns us not to go to money.

As you face challenges and difficulties in life, think about it. If you lay awake at night and think about some of the things that worry you, have you ever thought to yourself, "If only I had more money, things would go better." Put that on one side of a scale. Now on the other side of the scale, put in there every time that you have ever said to yourself, "If I had more righteousness, godliness, faith, love endurance and gentleness, things would go better." Which way is it tipping for you?

I know which way it tips for me. I don't think that and I know I should. Look at what God says to us here, "but you, man of God, you people of God, you who know Christ, flee away from this." Part of the fight of faith is fleeing—fleeing away from those things that are going to trip us up and lead us away from God, fleeing away from valuing it more than we value God and fleeing to the things that God values, but we don't always do it, do we?

Even in the life of a congregation, do we find ourselves saying, "If only there were more offerings, our ministry would be better" instead of saying, "If only we had people that were closer to God, if only we all had a stronger faith, if only we all had more righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness, boy would our ministry

look different.” We don’t always recognize our enemy because all too often our enemy is the first person we see in the morning when we look in the mirror.

The most amazing thing of all is that our God forgives us. You and I don’t keep this command without spot or blemish, but you and I stand before God without spot or blemish because, in Christ, God has forgiven us. In Christ we are perfect because Jesus loved the Father and his Father’s will above everything else, and that perfection is credited to us. Jesus took all the times that we don’t trust in God, all the times that we trust in something or someone else, to the cross, and there they were all washed away by his blood. You and I stand before him completely and absolutely spotless and blameless through the faith he has given us. That is what leads us to want to fight the fight of faith and recognize where our strength lies. Our strength lies in the one who made the good confession in the presence of Pilate. Our strength lies in Jesus Christ who did this for us, who took away our sins.

That is where our strength is, but I would also say that sometimes you and I get it messed up and think we are the strength, that we can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and do more and be more, and God will be blessed through our efforts. Or maybe sometimes you and I think we are the strength because we know better than God. We would never do that, would we?

Did God ever say things in his Word that make you say, “Are you sure about that God? I’m not so sure I want to hear that that is sin God, because I kind of like doing it,” or “Are you sure about that teaching God? I don’t know if I like that one.” Do you ever think that as you look at what Scripture says about who we unite in fellowship with? Have you ever said, “Well, that can’t be loving if that’s what God says.” Or have you not bothered to look at what God says. Then are you relying on yourself as your strength to determine what God would want you to do? Have you looked at that in the role of men and women and said, “That can’t be right.” Sometimes we think we are our strength and we know more than God.

When we rely on ourselves, we see what happens, don’t we? You don’t have to read very far into the Bible to see what happens when people rely on themselves and not on God. If you can make it to the third chapter, you find out what happens. The fruit was appealing to the eye, and it was good for gaining knowledge, so Eve took a bite and chewed it, swallowed it, and gave it to her husband, and he did the same, because they knew better than God. Ever since then, everyone has been stuck with sin.

Our strength is not ourselves. Our strength is the One who lived and died in our place and took away our sins, and the more we flee to him for righteousness, godliness, love, endurance, and gentleness, the more we will fight the good fight of faith. The more we will want to fight the good fight of faith, the more we will say, “Lord, what would you have me do? How can I best thank you for the gift of salvation that you have given me in what I say, in what I think, in what I do? How can I honor you with the things that you give me instead of using the things that you give me to honor myself?” The more God will bless us with his Spirit so that we find a joy, a peace, a happiness and a contentment that only God can give.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. It doesn't come from ourselves. It comes from God, so lean on him for the fight of faith.