

The 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost      September 18  
Zion Ev Lutheran Church      Columbus, WI  
**1 Timothy 6:6–16**      Rev. Timothy M. Schwartz  
Loved ones,

You can't just say it in a normal voice, because the hosts of the show never do. It's an obstacle course show? It's a televised competition in which some amazing amateur athletes from all walks of life have to work their way through ridiculously difficult jungle gyms or fall 15 feet into water below. It's called "*American Ninja Warrior*."

It's never too hard to tell what the announcers on the show are thinking. When a contestant falls, they say "There goes his hopes and dreams!" When one completes a really hard obstacle, they'll say "That was the greatest demonstration of strength and endurance in history!" And you can always tell when an athlete is in trouble because the commentators start to sound worried that the contestant is holding on to the rope on which they are swinging a little bit too long. "They're going to run out of grip strength." They've seen enough people succeed and enough people fail on "*American Ninja Warrior*" that they've learned something. You have to be able to let go of what you are holding on to in order to grab onto the next one.

Our bible readings this week tell us one thing, it's to Take Hold of Eternal Life. In his grace, he tells us to let go of the life we have and to stop trying to be content with things in this life that will never hold us up. Let go of the life you have here and TAKE HOLD OF ETERNAL LIFE! You'll find two things result when you do: I. Your heart will be content with the life you have been given, and you will also find that your life confesses Jesus Christ.

I.            With a Heart that Is Content

The Holy Spirit, speaking to us through the words of Jesus' apostle named Paul starts out: "***But godliness with contentment is great gain.***" Someone once explain what it means to be content like this: "Happiness isn't having everything you want. Happiness is wanting everything you have." This doesn't mean that a person never tries to improve their situation in life. If you get an opportunity to apply for a job that requires less travel so that you can spend more time with your family, or one with a pay increase, go ahead and apply. But if you don't get the job, don't let an attitude of bitterness take over your heart against the person who they hired instead or against the person who did the hiring.

Easier said than done, because sometimes the hiring process isn't fair. Sometimes you have medical bills that the new salary would have covered but your current one doesn't. Instead of a heart that is content, the heart fills up with resentment and worry. That's not godliness. That's sin.

That's the key, isn't it... Looking at all things in terms of God and sin and not just the worldly bottom line. Paul does not simply say something truish here like, "Being content is truly being rich," he says, ***godliness with contentment is great gain.*** True contentment is more than just appreciating what you have in this world. That's part of it, but real contentment comes when you realize all that you have in both this world and outside of this world. True contentment comes with realizing all that God has made happen for you. True contentment is

being able to let go of all that you have earned or hoped for in this life and grabbing on to eternal life with both fists.

Easy to say. Harder to do. But is it possible? You bet. Paul reminds us of a man named Job with these words. *“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*

How do I do that? Paul uses the language of a man named Job to explain: Job was the richest man in the world when he lived and most well respected, too. In one day, his business was robbed and ruined by looters and natural disasters took out what was left. Oh, and his skin broke out in ulcers. His friends that came to visit just blamed him for his troubles instead of comforting him. If there was anyone who had reason to be resentful, to be beyond stressed – distraught, it was this man named Job. And he is the one who said, *Job 1:21 (NIV) 21 and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.”*

We need to get out of minds and our hearts this idea that that we need anything more to stay alive than nourishment on the inside and protection on the outside, that we deserve to have a happy life, that we are entitled keep the things for which we work. We brought nothing into this world and we aren’t able to take anything with us, so no matter what we possess in this world, we aren’t going to have anything forever.

The only thing that has ever been in this world that we can have forever is the Son whom God sent here. We rack up a list of sins, and Jesus takes them from us and gives us righteousness instead. We store up doubts in our heart, Jesus keeps God’s promises to live and to die and to rise from the dead and takes out doubts away to be replaced by faith. Jesus loves us and send us his Holy Spirit through his Word, his water and his wine and bread so that we not only believe in him, but love each other. Jesus reminds us that no matter what enemies might try to take away or do to harm us in this world, we have no need to answer anger with violence, but with gentleness because no one can permanently harm us – he’s guaranteed us eternal life. It’s remembering that all here is temporary and what’s really important is eternal – and that we have eternal life in Jesus that means we can be content in any circumstances.

It means that Paul’s words in another book of the bible are the words of our heart, too. *“...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” (Philippians 4:11–13, NIV)*

## II. With a Life that Confesses Jesus Christ

And one other way to stay content is this: Remember, it’s not all about you. The first time our family watched American Ninja Warrior together, there was a contestant named Kevin Bull. He’s the guy that is famous for two things – a condition in which his body does not have any hair and his acrobatic way of working his way through the course. We watched as he worked his way through monkey bars that weren’t really bars, but spheres - much harder to grip than just a straight bar. A lot of contestants had run out of grip strength and fallen into the water. Kevin swung his knees up to one of the spheres and crossed his knees around it, hanging

upside down. He just hung there, rested his arms and then swung down and took on the next obstacle.

Our kids response – not just wow, but now when the walk into playground with monkey bars, they announce, it's time for "American Ninja Warrior" and start climbing. Kevin Bulls strength and endurance, his grip on the obstacle – inspired others to do the same.

Paul reminds the pastor to whom he originally wrote these words of the good confession he made and said, just like Jesus confessing before the man who ordered his execution, that the words that come out of your content heart through your mouth and your life will not only express your faith to God but will lead others to do the same.

As you go about the things that tighten your grip on eternal life – reading your bible, coming to worship, praying – and as you go about your life of faith – worshiping each week, fighting sin and confessing when you fall, pursuing righteousness, faith, love and gentleness – and especially when you speak words of contentment when people would expect words of complaint people who know you will be able to connect the dots. They'll know whether you are content or not.

Will your content heart that comes from faith in Jesus bring anyone to their knees so that they confess their sin and put their faith in Jesus. No. It takes words to do that – it takes the message of the seriousness of sin and words of the self-sacrificing love of God to do that. But your life of faith can at least get someone's attention so that they'll listen when you have a chance to say those words to them. What a beautiful thing it is when someone listens and what greater joy it will be when with hearts that are content in Christ as we worship together here or will completely content because we are in heaven together, we forever praise God with words similar to what the apostle said today: *God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.*