

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Who is the love of your life? If you are sitting here this morning with your spouse I sure hope that you glanced over at him or her or squeezed their hand to reaffirm what they already should know—that they are indeed the love of your life. If your spouse is not here this morning please make sure you go home and tell them that you wish they were in church with you this morning, and that they are the love of their life. Of course if you’re not married you may have a different love: it could be your fiancée, or it could be that special young man or young woman you think is the most wonderful person in the world. Children may love mom and dad best of all. Widows and widowers may still think of their dearly departed as the love of their life. Or they may redirect that love to their children.

If we ask who is the love of your life the answers are probably fairly predictable. But what if we ask, “What is the love of your life?” There may still be those smart husbands who make it clear to their wife that no one or nothing that can, in any way, shape, or form, ever take her place as the one and only love of his life. And yet, there are so many things in this world that do become the object of people’s love. Above them all is the one thing that Paul speaks of in our text today. All too often money becomes the love of a person’s life. Paul’s words are often misquoted when people say “Money is the root of all evil”. What Paul actually tells us is that *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*. The love of money has resulted in broken homes and divorces; it has caused all manner of crimes; it leads to divisions in families as brothers and sisters squabble over wills and estates. Worst of all, St. Paul tells us that *through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs*.

St. John tells us: *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* (1 John 2:15, ESV) The love of money and the love of the things that money can buy are, all too often, the love of people’s lives. People see money as the greatest treasure the world has to offer. But you and I have been given a treasure that is more valuable than all the money in the world. We are indeed the richest people of all when the love of our life is the one who loved us and gave His life for us, and who blesses us with the treasure of His love and mercy forever.

It is important that we remind ourselves that money itself is not evil. Money is a thing. It has no morality of any kind. It is our attitude towards money that can be sinful. God blessed many of his saints with great wealth. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, David—all of these people would be classed as billionaires by today’s standards. The man who invented “Gatorade” is a millionaire many time over—and he is a Lutheran, who has faithfully used that money to God’s glory. While we may not have them in our church, there are many Christian millionaires and even billionaires who have more than we could ever imagine, but who still have a good and godly attitude towards their wealth.

In a world where money is so important we may wish that we were among those Christian millionaires. Wouldn’t you love to

have more money? Wouldn't you love to be able to buy anything your heart desires? Wouldn't it be nice to have the means of buying a new car every year or so, or having the latest and greatest that technology can offer? A nice summer home on an exclusive island somewhere—maybe around Fiji—that would be nice. And if we didn't have to work, we may think that would be the best of all.

Money does provide the necessities of life. It does provide the resources that we need to carry out the church's ministry. Money can be a great blessing. But it can also be a curse if it becomes the love of our life. All of the promotions for the lotteries play on this love. If only we win the lottery then we can have more than enough to make our lives happy. But how much is enough? For most people it's always what they have—and then some. Contentment often eludes even the wealthiest of people. That is why St. Paul notes that ***godliness with contentment is great gain***. To get the most out of our financial resources and material possessions we have to keep everything in perspective. We need to know where our love should truly lie. When money is the love of our life it drives our ambitions; it directs our emotions; it can even determine our relationships. But when our God is the centre of our universe He blesses our relationships. He helps us find joy and meaning in our lives. He gives us pleasure in the things of this world. He enables us to live life to the fullest.

In our gospel lesson today Jesus told a parable about two men: one man, whose true love was money; and Lazarus, who is so poor that he longed for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. But Lazarus had something the rich man never had and that is his faith in God. There is a contentment that can fill us even if we don't have money and goods. It is the contentment that comes from the treasure we can keep forever. St. Paul tells Timothy that: ***we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world***. The rich man cannot take his money or the things of the world with him. He trusted in his money to make his existence all worth while. The problem was that he focussed only on a small, narrow part of that existence. Now in torment in hell what good was the love of his life?

We are drawing near to Thanksgiving here in Canada, and that always seems to be a time to remember the blessings we have in our lives. The simple truth is that there are many blessings that we have, even if we don't have some of the worldly blessings other have. We have people who love us, even though most of us also have people who feel something very different towards us. Most people find love in the members of their family. There are those within the church that have genuine love and care for one another. We gather as a people who love the Lord and are blessed with those who use their gifts in joyful service and commitment to the Lord. But as wonderful, as special, as important as those things might be, there is one love that outranks them all. It is the love and faith and hope that we have in the Lord who first loved us with an everlasting, immeasurable love. The apostle John, who calls himself ***"That disciple whom Jesus loved"*** (John 21:7, ESV) can say, with all conviction: ***"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*** (1 John 4:10, ESV) This should never fail to amaze us. The hymn writer feels this amazement and writes: *What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What wondrous love is this, O my soul! What wondrous love is this, That caused the Lord of bliss To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul.* (LSB 543, st. 1) This love came to life for people who saw the movie, *"The Passion of the Christ"* We see the suffering Saviour, and marvel that He did all this for us. He endured the shame and agony of the cross for us, for we are the love of His life. Christ sees us for what we are: poor, destitute, blind and helpless. He knows that do not have the means of saving ourselves from the consequences of our sin. He knows we do not deserve His love. Yet He comes to our rescue. He gives Himself in our place. He bears our sin on the cross and washes us clean with His holy, precious blood. His love is greater than death, and He rises to bless us in all things. He loves us, and as another hymn writer says: *"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all"* (LSB 425)

When the love of our life is the Lord of life, then everything else in life falls into perspective. St. Paul tells Timothy: ***As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*** So, what is the love of your life? We find both a renewed contentment and a renewed joy in the things of this world when God is the chief love of our life. As we love Jesus, and cling to Him in faith, He gives us joy and happiness in our spouse—a statistical fact that has been verified by scientific study, by the way. In His love, we learn to be content with what God does give us, even though He doesn't give all of us material blessings in the same level. But Paul tells all of us ***to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share***. As we grow in the love of Christ we learn how we can use the things we have to be a blessing to one another, to the church and to the world around us. In His love, we find contentment, peace and purpose.

Paul knew that lesson from his own experience. He says: ***"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."*** (Philippians 4:11–13, ESV)

What is the love of your life? Is it something of real and lasting value? Is it something that will endure forever? Or is it something that we will leave behind when we leave this world? There is a love that will give you the best of both worlds—the love we have in Christ and for Christ will bless us now, and we can take that love with us into the joy of eternal blessings far beyond anything we can even begin to imagine. That, dear friends, is a treasure indeed. Amen.