

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Year A)

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*1 Timothy 6:6-19*

*Of course, 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. 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.*

*But as for you, child of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 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, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.*

*As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.*

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There is much cowardice in the news these days. Politicians on both sides of the aisle who, for decades, have failed to protect our children from gun violence. CEO's of companies like Disney who make 1,424 times the average amount paid to his employees. Nations such as the United States of America who, because of the cowardice of *both* Republicans *and* Democrats, have failed to act boldly on the crisis of global warming.

But, I'll tell you, there *is* someone who is giving me courage and conviction and her name is Greta Thunberg. She is many things but a coward is not one of them. If you do not know who she is, then allow me to introduce her to you. She is a sixteen year old young woman from Sweden who has made it her life's cause to bring awareness to the looming crisis of global warming.

A little over a year ago, in August of 2018, she decided to go on strike from school and protest outside of the Swedish parliament, calling politicians to address the issue of global warming. Greta found the inspiration to do this from the protests organized by the student survivors of the Parkland mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School in Florida where 17 were murdered and 17 more were injured. Emboldened by their bravery, Greta Thunberg decided to exercise her own bravery and protest what she saw as the biggest threat to her future and the future of all of her generation around the world: global warming.

Soon, her efforts went viral and students in 125 countries around the world joined her in skipping school to bring awareness to the issue. Now, a year later, she is as passionate and determined as ever. Recently, she addressed a group of billionaire entrepreneurs at a climate summit in Davos, Switzerland saying: “Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people, to give them hope. But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is.”

She is quite a remarkable young woman. And as a side note, she has also been diagnosed with Aspergers Autism and she calls it her superpower!

Just last week, after taking two weeks to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a zero-emission boat, Greta Thunberg addressed leaders at the United Nations in New York City telling them the following: “This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be in school. But you have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. People are suffering, people are dying, entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of endless economic growth. How dare you!”

Friends, these are the words of a prophet. A prophet makes us *uncomfortable* because they bring to light those behaviors within us that threaten God’s creation as it was intended to be. She is doing the work of the Gospel, I think, because she is *fighting the good fight*.

That phrase is the center of gravity of today’s lectionary passage from the letter of 1 Timothy. Fight the good fight of the faith.

And it’s an eternally relevant phrase, isn’t it? We all have to choose our battles. We have to choose what to fight *for*....in our congregations, in our marriages, in our families, in our places of work, in our public witness. We can not - and *should* not - attend every fight that we’re invited to. But there are some things that are simply worth fighting *for*.

So, we must fight the good fight. But since this scripture speaks of the “good fight” then I think it’s safe to assume the presence of *bad* fights. Friends, there are bad fights happening all around us. A month or so ago, we were reminded of another fighter named Pharaoh...but Pharaoh was not fighting the good fight, he was definitely fighting a bad one. And it didn’t end well for him.

Instead of fighting the good fight of caring for God’s creation, Pharaoh chose the bad fight of trying to bend it to his will to serve his greed. Which brings up an interesting point which is this: most “bad” fights come down to greed just like Pharaoh’s greed, a greed based on accumulating wealth at the expense of others.

It is interesting isn’t it, that both before and after today’s command from 1 Timothy to fight the good fight of faith, that we have warnings against getting caught up in the seduction of money. Notice, it doesn’t say that money alone is the roots of all kinds of evil. Instead, it says that the *love of money* is the roots of all kinds of evil. And it is safe to say that the evil of Pharaoh is rooted in his love for money. And, because of that “bad” fight, creation suffers.

But we are called a different kind of fight. A good fight. The good fight of faith. But we are not called to fight like Pharaoh. Notice the sentence *before* the line “fight the good fight.”

“But as for you, child of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.”

*Those* are the weapons with which we fight. We don't fight with the fierce fear of Pharaoh. We fight, instead, with righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. *That* is the good fight of faith. But, you know what, that's *really* hard to do.

It's so much easier to fight like Pharaoh, to pick up the weapons of anger, cruelty, oppression, trying to be the loudest voice in the room to drown out everyone else. But you and I are called to a much higher standard than that. You and I are called to put on the armor of righteousness and fight the good fight of faith by being firm in the values that scripture teaches us, standing firm in the values that we want to pass along to the generations that will come after us, standing firm in the values that make the good fight *worth fighting for*.

So, friends, let us continue our work. Do not be disheartened by the cruelty of the world. Pick up the mantle that Jesus Christ has given us to do justice, love kindness, walk humbly, and fight the good fight of the faith.

In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us God's children say...Amen.