

## ***Based on Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6:6-19 Pentecost 16; Proper 21***

*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, man 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.*

1 Timothy 6:6-19

I don't know if you've heard of Malcolm Gladwell, but he's a sort of modern philosopher who is very influential and, in his book, "Outliers: The Story of Success," he introduces the concept of the "10,000-Hour Rule," asserting that the key to achieving true expertise in any skill is simply a matter of practicing, albeit in the correct way, for at least 10,000 hours. I think this is a really interesting observation because it suggests that dedication and commitment weigh more heavily than innate talent or inclination, confirming the old adage that "practice makes perfect."

And, in a sense, this is pretty much the same thing that the author of First Timothy is saying about the life of faith. Building a life modeled on Jesus' own life requires intention and effort on our part. We have to actually choose to follow Jesus and to expect that it may be, at times, challenging or difficult; that it will require sacrifice. It is not for nothing that Jesus asks us to take on his yoke. The way of Jesus is not for the passive or faint of heart, it asks real effort on our part.

Athletes and musicians practice countless hours before they are good enough to perform and then they must continue to practice and rehearse to develop the muscle memory so that they can excel at the moment of competition or performance. It is the same with following Jesus, except that for us, being Christ in the world isn't a short-term event like a game or concert, but a life-long opportunity to embody Christ in our choices and interactions with others. And like athletes and musicians, most of us would benefit from the input of a coach. We recognize this for children and those who are new to faith, but all of us will walk closer to Jesus when we do so with a companion, what the ancient Irish called an *anam cara*, a spirit friend. Someone who we can be accountable to, someone to encourage us, to pray with and for us, someone to hold our deepest hopes and fears, someone to love us and honor our dignity.

Christianity then isn't like being a sports fan. We aren't invited to gather in the stands that we might watch the saints at work. No, we are invited to enter onto the field of play ourselves, not as observers, passively cheering on our side, but as active and vital members of the team, continuing the mission and ministry of Jesus to bring the light of God's good news to a darkened world.

Blessings,

*Jon*