

“The Right Kind of Rich”
Recognition of Veterans’ Day, Stewardship-theme (Live Courageously)
By Rev. James C. Ramsey

Texts: Isaiah 2:1-5
1 Timothy 6:11-12, 17-19

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Several weeks ago many were abuzz with a massive lottery drawing, worth well over a billion dollars! More than one of our members half-jokingly suggested to me that when they win that lottery, they will be able to personally solve East Union's deficit. Despite my prayers and theirs, to the best of my knowledge, the jackpot was not claimed by any member of East Union!

What one of us, though, hasn't been captivated by one get-rich scheme or another? It could have been from some advertisement that suggested you could make 6 figures, right from your home, doing practically nothing, it was easy, there was no risk involved. All you needed to do was call the 1-800 Number. I've never made the call – but I confess it sounds tempting.

Maybe I could get into flipping houses or invent some new product that would take the internet by storm and then I could retire early and get a few new cars...and boats...maybe even a plane!

If given just one wish, there's a good percentage of people who would answer, "I want to be rich." And I'm guessing that percentage would hold up not just today, but in antiquity, even in Bible times. Apparently there were rich people flaunting their wealth in the first few centuries of the early church. Those who wished they could be rich, need only to take a gander at the rich ones in their midst.

The Apostle Paul was concerned about the behavior of some of these rich members in the church. He wrote to the young church leader Timothy with a whole range of concerns and advice, but he hits on this bit about the rich pretty hard. There were some church members who were the wrong kind of rich. They conducted themselves with a kind of arrogant superiority, disdainful of lesser, poorer members. These haughty ones trusted not so much in God, but in the almighty shekel! Paul instructed Timothy to advise such folk, "*Set your hope rather in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*"

The Apostle then explained how to be the right kind of rich: *They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, 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.*"

This morning's sermon is the second in a three-part series exploring what it means to Live Courageously – to, as the Apostle Paul puts it, "take hold of the life that really is life!" Because your church officers are currently imagining the 2019 East Union budget, I'm thinking of living courageously as it pertains to our resources, how we might serve God boldly.

Last week we began the series on All Saints' Day – mindful of the Great Cloud of Witnesses all around us. Many of you wrote down a name and posted it on our cloud board. I suggested that we try our hand at cloud computing.

We read part of Psalm 34, noting that the psalmist understands that life comes from God, and so assumes a posture of praise and worship. The psalmist knows it is the LORD who delivers, the LORD who hears when we cry out, the LORD who saves.

The psalmist can be generous and giving because those who fear God have no want...those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. The Psalmist knew how to live courageously.

Last week we were inspired by the Great Cloud of Witnesses. Today, we are inspired by veterans, especially our own veterans, many of them here with us. I hope you took some time to see their pictures in the opening Power Point. You can see them listed in our bulletin – Compass Points. Perhaps we can take a moment now and invite all those who have served in our armed forces to stand...let me say, for all of us, "Thank you for your service." We know you sacrificed for us and for your country. We know it wasn't easy.

I understand, that for many veterans, there are memories they don't want to relive, times they would rather forget, experiences they would not speak of.

Our veterans can teach us and inspire us to live courageously. **Tim Resciniti** was training to be an Army Ranger when he was injured "and stripped of everything he thought he knew about himself." But his faith was renewed and became the light he needs to see his way through difficult times. He remembers singing "Amazing Grace" at chapel and feeling every word in a way he can't adequately describe, but when he looks back on it he still is humbled to this day.

Dave Passarella enlisted in the Army at the age of 18 and served from 1951 to 1953. He leaned on childhood Sunday School lessons for comfort, support and trust.

Joe Williams served in the Army and was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1967. His mom gave him a small New Testament when he went into basic training. He read the whole thing and it helped him a lot and he was sure God was with him.

John Katich served in the Army, including two tours in Vietnam. God spoke to John when he was 52 years old and told him that his life was saved. God provided an angel with him the day a mortar detonated 15 feet from him. Everything around John, including the walls and ceiling of the building he was in was riddled with shrapnel, but John was untouched that day. It was miraculous that John was not dead, not even injured.

Sometimes God provides angels in flesh and blood. That was the case for **Kevin Vresh**, who served in the Marines from 1989 to 1991. Kevin's angel was named Dennis Rocheford, the chaplain of his unit. Dennis was a twice-wounded young marine in Vietnam. His story of faith, survival and promise to God to serve others was an inspiration to Kevin and many others. Dennis had promised God that if he spared his life, he would spend the rest of it serving Him. Dennis did survive Vietnam and he kept his promise, entering seminary and becoming a Navy chaplain. Kevin is grateful for Dennis, who was a constant source of comfort and guidance to him and everyone in his unit.

Billy Maher is not a veteran...yet! He is currently an active duty Marine in California. He enlisted following his graduation from Deer Lakes last year. His story is similar to Kevin's. I want you to hear it:

[[VIDEO – Billy Maher]]

Thank you, Billy, for your service.

I don't know what Billy's salary is, serving in the Marines. But I can assure you he is not getting rich...at least not as the world measures rich – the Right Kind of Rich, though, doesn't begin with money. It begins rather with the pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. It involves fighting – the good fight of faith, taking hold of the life that really is life.

The Right Kind of Rich doesn't begin with money – but it does involve money, how we spend it, how we invest it – how we use it to do good, how we are generous, ready to share. But even if you have

only a few shekels to your name...you can still be rich in good works.

I want to invite you again to invest in God's work here at East Union, what God is doing now, and what God plans for us in the future. I'll talk next week about some of our dreams moving forward.

You could decide to keep most or all of your money, not give it here or anywhere else. It's a free country! Although on this day we remember that our freedom does not come cheaply. You could hoard your possessions until your dying day. Some have tried that, believing they could take their precious treasure with them...only to find out that what they thought was treasure was really...well, here's the story:

There was this rich man who was determined to take his wealth with him into the next life.

The Lord finally gave in to his fervent prayers.

There was one condition: He could bring only one suitcase of valuables. The rich man decided to fill his suitcase with gold bullion.

The day came when God called him home.

St. Peter greeted him at the Pearly Gates, but informed him he couldn't bring his suitcase. "Oh, but I have an agreement with God," the man explained.

"That's unusual," said St. Peter. "Mind if I take a look?"

The man opened the suitcase to reveal the shining gold bullion.

St. Peter was amazed. "Why in the world would you bring pavement?"

You could get a book that would purport to teach you how to get rich. There are thousands of them out there. It would be good to be rich...but not rich in the world's assessment, not rich as in a suitcase of gold bullion.

Let us strive to be rich...but the right kind of rich...the kind of rich where we have copious amounts of good deeds...the kind of rich that emboldens us to live courageously, generously, lovingly.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.