

*From today's second reading, an epistle to Timothy:
"Take hold of the life that really is life."*

In the middle of the night, standing in a deserted storage facility,
before piles and piles and piles of money,
big enough for two large men to lay on like a king-sized bed on steroids,
more than she can spend in ten lifetimes,
Skyler White turns to her husband and says, "Walt, I want my life back."

Some of you may recognize this as an iconic scene from
the TV drama "Breaking Bad"
about a terminally ill high school chemistry teacher who
"cooks" the drug crystal meth as a sort of insurance policy for his family.
I know...and you may puzzle as to why
I would be such a fan of it and its prequel, "Better Call Saul."

But in fact these shows are not really about illicit drugs
any more than today's scripture lessons are only about money.
Like today's scripture readings, they're about, well, *life*.
"The human condition," to use a phrase.

In the show, Walter White's stated goal is to pay for
his cancer treatment and leave his family as much money as possible.
Commendable, on the face of it.
But Walt chooses such a warped means to this end
and becomes so obsessed by the empire he's building,
that it ends up destroying his family (and many others too.)
He makes so much money it kills them.

"I want my life back,"
says his wife Skyler, standing before a mound of money.
She longed for the life that really is life.

Today's second reading, an epistle, a letter to one of St. Paul's protégés named Timothy, is also concerned with living an authentic life. This letter to Timothy includes what is probably one of the most often misquoted lines of scripture. What it says is, "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." Not money itself, mind you, but *loving it*.

Money isn't necessarily evil; it's not even a necessary evil. Money makes a lot of good things possible.

Back in the 1860s, folks raised about \$70,000 to rebuild this building. I'm glad they did, aren't you? In the years since many others have spent far more than that upkeeping and expanding and adapting it to changing times, up to the recent livestreaming equipment.

Recently, during the height of the pandemic, we surpassed our goal for the Joining Jesus Capital Campaign raising more than \$350,000 to enhance our life together, now, and well into the future. Thanks to this, we have a new elevator system that people, especially some of the most vulnerable, are no longer afraid to ride in. I'm very glad of that, how about you?

I'm glad we each had the money to get ourselves here today, whether we drove cars or walked. Even those of us lucky enough to walk – to not have to buy gas and upkeep cars -- needed money to get here. Shoes, maybe socks, taxes paid to provide for sidewalks and such. None of this is free; it takes money.

Money helps feed our bodies, educate our children, provide medical care and a roof over our heads. Money allows us to support causes we care about.

It helps us express our highest ideals.

The individual who is the highest donor to our capital campaign seems genuinely thrilled to be able to use money to help others join Jesus. Now that's money expressing an ideal.

But we all know that money can be a source of fear and anxiety. Not having enough. Not knowing if we'll outlive it. Not knowing what the heck to do with it.

These fears may be heightened in our inflationary economy today, but they're not unique to us.

The same concerns were addressed in that letter to Timothy 2,000 years ago.

And the counsel of our namesake Paul and other early Christians? Be content with what you have; take the long view. You brought nothing into this world and you'll take nothing out. To have the basics is enough – and even then you still have plenty to share. So be generous, rich in good works. That's how you store up real treasure. That's how you take hold of the life that really is life.

Walter White of "Breaking Bad" never got this memo. But neither did the guy in today's gospel about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man ignores Lazarus, dies, and goes to the fires of Hades, while Lazarus is carried by angels up to Father Abraham. Even here the rich man tries to pull rank, demanding that Lazarus carry his water. Failing that, the rich man tires to use Lazarus as his errand boy to go back and warn his five brothers. But Father Abraham intervenes saying that if the rich man didn't listen to Moses and the prophets, why should his brothers listen to someone who rises from the dead?

Well, we're that rich man's brothers. And sisters.

We have the witness of One who rises from the dead, Jesus the Christ.
We should listen to him,
telling stories and parables like the one we just heard.
Stories showing that how we treat one another matters
because we all matter to God.
And a lot of how we treat one another depends on how we use money.
Whether we love it or God more.

We should listen to Jesus' life,
how he lived with and for others.
We should listen to his death,
how he gave his all for the love of this broken world.
And we should listen to his rising again,
for it brings us fullness of life – in this life, as well as the next.

We should listen to some of the letters of the early Christians,
who struggled with many of the same questions we do today,
and who answered, plainly:
*Do good, be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
thus storing up the treasure of a good foundation for the future.*

That's how we *take hold of the life that really is life.*
That's the life we were created to live.

Amen.