



First United Church of Oak Park

The Life That Really Is Life

1 Timothy 6: 6-19

The Rev. Lydia Mulkey

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There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment.

I've been watching *LuLaRich*, which is a documentary about the multilevel marketing company LuLaRoe. The company claimed you could earn full-time pay with part-time work. They said their mission was "improving lives and blessing families." What they were actually doing was charging people five to ten thousand dollars for a low-quality product they could resell.

The documentary shows how lives were ruined and families were broken. Once they were in the company, the folks interviewed shared that they were constantly told they weren't working hard enough, weren't thin enough, weren't buying enough of the company's product or recruiting enough new salespeople. The only way to make enough money to survive in the company was to recruit, so only a few people at the top were actually making money, while the majority were plunged into debt. The owners of the company continue to claim that everything they did was out of their religious convictions and was for the betterment of women's lives and never a way for them to get rich, even though the evidence is all to the contrary.

Godliness without contentment.

So the story goes, this letter was written to Timothy when he was with the Ephesians, who had some troublemakers in their church. These troublemakers were claiming they knew the truth about God and would do you the favor of selling it to you. They were claiming to do good, but they were actually trying to get rich.

Godliness without contentment. It looks like self-righteousness and greed.

Every year in November, in this country, we hear talk of gratitude all around us. We try to find contentment in what we have and give thanks. Unfortunately, we also tell this story about "the first Thanksgiving." In my 1980s kindergarten class, we wore

construction paper headbands with either silly black hats with buckles or brightly colored feathers stapled onto them. We sat down and ate our school lunch as if we were recreating a historical event when the pilgrims (our ancestors in the faith, by the way) “discovered” people called Indians and invited them to dinner.

Unfortunately, the true story of the pilgrims is that they engaged in an attempted genocide of the Wampanoag people whose land they were stealing. The pilgrims held regular Thanksgivings following bloody defeats of the Wampanoag people, even displaying the bodies of Wampanoag people in the town square as a part of the celebration. The myth of the first Thanksgiving was written and spread in order to change a history we as a people did not want to face. We write a happy story, talk about gratitude and contentment, and avoid the ungodly truth of our history. With our hands over our eyes or our fingers in our ears, we remain blissfully unaware.

Contentment without godliness. That just looks like willful ignorance.

So, there you have it; a picture of godliness without contentment in *LuLaRich* and of contentment without godliness in the lie of the first Thanksgiving. Pictures of lives ruined, lost, even erased. Our work as people of faith, as children of God, is to offer an alternative picture. A third way. An image of the place where contentment combines with godliness and results not in lives ruined or lost, but in the life that really is life! We are invited to see the lies and schemes and to choose something else entirely.

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. Do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for yourselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that you may take hold of the life that really is life.

Amen.