

GAINING WEIGHT
Sermon, May 29, 2022
The Seventh Sunday of Easter
Youth Sunday / Memorial Day Weekend
Texts: Romans 8:12-17; II Timothy 3:10-17

I said this at least three times before on this particular Sunday of the calendar in past years, but I'll say it again: Tomorrow is Memorial Day, when we honor the memory of those of our armed forces who gave their lives to secure and defend the liberation and freedom of so many, including us, around this world over the years. I'm personally convinced the best thing we can do to show our gratitude and honor their memory is to exercise our freedom responsibly and well ... we want to see freedom not so much as the right to do as we choose, but as the opportunity to choose to do what is right..

And today is Youth Sunday. Thank you to all the dedicated volunteers and church staff, all the devoted parents and family members, all the good friends and loving church members who are doing all they can to help the young women and men entrusted to this church's care to learn to exercise **their** freedom responsibly and well. Thank you to all who have been working to help them learn to choose what is good and right, to train them up in the way they should go, by encouraging them to become young men and women of Christian faith, integrity and honor ... in short, in the spirit of our reading from the epistle of Romans, thanks for being **Heir Conditioners** ... "Heir" as in one who has gained an inheritance. Romans 8:16 *"... the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."* It is literally in the Will of God that, in Jesus Christ we are made heirs. In a nutshell, that's what the ministry of this church is all about ... Heir Conditioning ... helping prepare all of us, and especially our young people, to be worthy gainers of this weighty inheritance. To put it another way, the ministry of this church is about HOW TO GAIN AND KEEP WEIGHT.

Some of you are thinking, *"Well, I can do that!"* Or, *"The pastor certainly looks like an expert on this topic."* I'm talking, though, of a different kind of weight, a weight all of us should want to gain. In fact, by the end of the sermon, I'm hoping you'll see the church as something of a spiritual health spa where we go to gain (not lose) real weight. I'm talking of the kind of weight which is a condition of a soul ... the condition of a soul that has so grown and expanded and developed that it has something of a genuine spiritual "mass" about it, enough mass that it has developed almost a type of gravity, an attractive force, which draws others into its orbit.

I'm sure each one of you knows someone (*or someones*) you would consider a person of "weight." People of depth and wisdom, people who you just want to be around, people you want your children to get to know, people who have the most extraordinary insights and great ideals about them. These people inspire us. They attract us. We respect their judgment. We trust them for good guidance and advice; these are people who give us a sense of stability and security and safety. These are people who exude genuine-ness and character and trustworthiness, people with large souls we gravitate to like planets that draw us into their orbit. Their immensity has come in part from scars that have healed well and failures that have been redeemed and forgiven and learned from. Such people are an inspiration, filling us with the desire to do better and be better; such people are venerable and significant and weighty people that call forth the best that is in us.

I've mentioned this a "few" times in years past, in the Hebrew language is the word *kavod*, a root that means *"to be heavy, weighty."* "Kavod" is often translated in our English Bibles as "glory." When the Old Testament Jew spoke of the Kavod of God, the Glory of God, he spoke of the *weightiness* of God. Now, that's not to imply that God is somehow overweight, that He is sitting on His divine throne bellowing, *"Hey, hey, hey!"* down through the ages. No; to the Jew, God was the epitome of *Weight-iness*, the ultimate Significance, the number one "Heavy." We use the same imagery today in English. Something that is laden with significance, something that is full of meaning and/or importance is *heavy*, weighty. Or, conversely, when something is fluffy, insignificant, frivolous, we say it is "light." When we are treated as if we are insignificant, when we are snubbed, we say we were treated *lightly*, as if we had no weight, no

significance, no glory. Biblically, glory and honor carry with it this idea of weight, “Kavod.” One who has *kavod* is one who carries weight, one who is significant, one who is to be treated with respect and honor. Being THIS kind of a heavyweight is a desirable thing! A true “heavyweight champion.”

In our epistle reading from Timothy, Paul is writing to his young protégé and gives something of what I would like to call a Nutrisystem three-part weight *gain* prescription plan, a three step plan on how to gain good weight, gravitas, credibility, stability, attractiveness ... basically, how to become a true heavyweight champion. Paul says in so many words that “weight gain” comes through (1) living godly lives in the face of resistance, (2) keeping rooted in your faith **tradition**, and through (3) reading and studying and living by the Holy Scriptures.

(1) Paul writes, *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Living a godly life takes tenacity, discipline, it takes the exercising of principles in the face of resistance from those who are largely unprincipled! As Paul promises, Christians who want to live godly lives will meet resistance. Resistance can be a good thing! Resistance can crush or break you, but *resistance that’s resisted* can make you stronger ... just ask any weightlifter! Faith is a muscle that must be exercised in the face of (or in spite of) resistance; as faith is exercised, it gains mass, it gains weight, it grows! In fact, faith is a muscle that *only* grows when exercised; left alone and unused, it atrophies. It is the nature of faith to expand as it is exercised, so if we would gain the good weight, we must exercise faith, and especially in the face of resistance, persecution and/or evil!

(2) A second way Paul tells Timothy how to gain good weight is by continuing in our sacred tradition. Paul tells Timothy, *“Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”* Timothy grew up on what we call the lap of faith. In the first chapter of this same epistle, Paul wrote to Timothy the faith lived first in Timothy’s grandmother Lois, then that same faith lived in Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and now that faith lives in you, Timothy. In other words, Timothy, you didn’t come up with this faith on your own. This faith came to Timothy as an inheritance. Like Timothy, we’ve all inherited the gift of faith from those who’ve gone before us. That’s what we call a *tradition*.

Tradition is not just some conservative “thing” of trying to hang on to an outdated past (*as it is often caricatured*); tradition is a way of deliberately and purposefully living that roots our lives deep into thousands of years of genuine faith. The church has a great weighty tradition we rehearse each Sunday, a tradition that drives and roots our lives deep into thousands of years of faith ... faith that was discovered and exercised and held on to through times of turmoil and war and illness and storm after storm that blew away pretty much everything *but* faith. When we stand to sing the grand hymns, when we stand to affirm the Apostles’ Creed, we are echoing the exact words of apostles, saints, martyrs, scholars, kings, queens, prophets, faithful servants and communities of faith down through history who have already faced everything we could possibly face in our lives and have come through with a substantial, weighty faith that is more than intact! This faith is their great gift to us; all of the Loises and Eunices who have gone before us have given us a faith that now lives in us AND is ours to pass on to generations to come. Living in us is the weighty faith of the Old Testament patriarchs, the prophets, the kings and queens, the persistent widows who banged on doors for justice, the martyrs and apostles and all the communion of saints. That is our weighty inheritance. And we need that inheritance if we are going to survive serious hardship; we need to have a weighty faith to give us the stability necessary to come through the storms of life better, not bitter; larger, not smaller. That is what Christian tradition offers ... a time-tested great faith with great ideals that make a life weightier, more attractive and eternally significant.

So, Paul says get “heavy” and find significance by (1) faithfully living godly lives in the face of persecution and resistance (2) continuing in our sacred tradition, and the third way Paul presents for gaining weight is to (3) **Know the sacred Scriptures**. *“All Scripture is God-breathed, inspired by God,”* Paul asserts. And the purpose of this inspiration, he writes, is *“... to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”* The Bible is the Word of God that draws us to the weightiest Person who ever existed, Jesus Christ. As we read and study and apply these God-breathed words, we find that Jesus’ passions are becoming our passions, His great ideals are becoming our great ideals, His relationship with the Father becomes our relationship to the Father, and His life becomes ours. And the weight of God’s glory descends upon us.

Again, we want to see freedom not so much as the right to do as we choose, but as the opportunity to choose to do what is right ... so choose to gain weight!