

INI

Trinity 10 / 9 August 2015
2 Timothy 1,7-10

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson, which was read earlier:

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me his prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer.

Introduction. In the mid-60s AD, Paul was again in prison in Rome and writing a letter of encouragement to his son in the faith, Timothy (1Timothy 1,2; 2 Timothy 1,2; Titus 1,4). Timothy was in Ephesus, and contending against both false teachers within the church as well as the general hostility shown by the pagan governing authorities. The situation in the in church Ephesus had grown worse, some had deserted Paul, and at least one person whom Paul had excommunicated was still working mischief (2 Timothy 2,17-18). Moreover, Paul was not expecting to survive his imprisonment and subsequent trial in Rome. Paul wanted Timothy to entrust the ministry to other faithful Christians in Ephesus (2Timothy 2,2) and come to Rome before winter, when travel by ship in the Mediterranean would become impossible (2 Timothy 4,9.11.21).

Paul's purpose in writing to Timothy was to encourage Him to remain faithful to the Gospel of Christ and to "entrust" this Gospel "to faithful men who would be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2,2). Adversity was all around in Ephesus. But Paul's words of

encouragement to Timothy are also words of encouragement to us.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (1,7)

This brings me to my theme for today's sermon: "**Jesus Moves Us From Timidity To Power.**" I'll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Don't Be Afraid;**
- 2) Jesus Has Overcome Death;** and,
- 3) Jesus' Call Empowers Us.**

1) Don't Pull Your Punches. Throughout the ages, peoples of many cultures have been frightened of Jesus. This should not surprise us, since the Apostle John said of Jesus that "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1,11). And Jesus said of Himself and His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me first" (John 15,18). Hate turns into fright, and hate is directed not only at Jesus, but also at His disciples.

When he was writing to Timothy, one of Paul's biggest challenges came from the secular authorities who wanted to try him and other Christians, most probably in the aftermath of the great fire in Rome in 64 AD, which occurred while Nero was emperor. While the Roman historian Tacitus makes it clear that the charges were a fabrication, Tacitus also had no great liking for Christians. Nero burned many of his victims alive in public. As mentioned, Paul did not expect to survive his trial.

The biggest challenge Timothy faced, however, was not outside of the church, but within the church. False teachers were wrecking havoc within the Ephesian congregation. In writing to Timothy, Paul spoke about weak Christians and their relation to false teachers:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for

themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4,3-4)

Thus Timothy faced the problem of having his spiritual father, Paul, in prison, and a congregation (or congregations) which were wanting to have their ears tickled with false doctrine. This could lead to discouragement.

There are some who feel that when Paul wrote that “God has not given us a spirit of timidity” he is intimating that Timothy was timid and needed encouragement. But the construction of “for” and then “but” indicates that Paul is setting up a foil for what comes next. Paul speaks the same way in Romans when he writes,

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8,15)

Here Paul is not saying we have a spirit of slavery, and in the same way he is not saying that Timothy is timid. Indeed, Paul speaks of “us,” of both Timothy and himself. I don’t think too many people would have called Paul as “timid” person.

The word “timid” is better translated as “cowardice.” Thus, in the face of opposition one should not turn tail and run. Or what might even be worse, to somehow decide that you should compromise your witness for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul could have done that in Rome. His “get out prison card” could have been to deny Christ. In Ephesus, Timothy could have pulled his punches by watering down pure doctrine in order to tickle the ears that wanted to be tickled. But Paul writes words of encouragement.

On 20 April 1999 at Columbine High School in Colorado two students murdered over a dozen other students and teachers and then

committed suicide. One girl was confronted by one of the murders and, with a gun pointed at her, asked if she believed in Jesus. She said “Yes,” and was then shot dead. Later the school invited students and parents to paint tiles on a school wall in commemoration of the dead; some wrote words such as “Jesus wept” and “God is Love.” The school removed 90 tiles with such so-called “offending messages” that displayed any Christian sentiment and a US District court upheld the school’s censorship (*National Post*, 26 Sept. 2003, p A12).

In North America there is a great cry for freedom of religion. But most of those who do the crying really want “freedom from religion, and specifically freedom from Christianity. There is a move afoot to declare portions of the Bible “hate literature.” Some Lutheran bishops in other synods have told pastors not to preach on certain topics because this could be construed as “hate speech.”

But Paul’s words of encouragement encouraged not only him, not only Timothy, encouraged not only that girl at Columbine, but also us, for Paul shows us that we should have no fear because

2) Jesus Has Overcome Death. Because Jesus has overcome death, He has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (v 10). Jesus did not abolish death for Himself, but He abolished it for us.

Jesus went to the Cross “to be a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2,6). Thus, His death is the

propitiation [or, satisfaction] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2,2)

You see, all of us by nature are sinful, and apart from Jesus there is no forgiveness of sins. Perhaps that is what all the enemies of Jesus fear: the recognition that they are sinners that that apart from Jesus and that they are doomed.

We may ask: “if Jesus has abolished death, then why do Christians still die?” All Christians, except for those still alive on Judgment Day, must pass through death because all of us have sin dwelling in us, as Paul says, “the body is dead because of sin” (Romans 8,10). But the death of Christians is no longer death in the full sense because they are delivered from the thing that makes death so terrible — the sense of divine wrath. Where there is forgiveness, the forgiveness that Christ has won for us completely apart from our merits, then there is the removal of the sting of death. The sting of death is the power of the Law, which condemns; but since we have been forgiven for Jesus’ sake, we are no longer under the wrath of the Law. (1 Corinthians 15,53).

Jesus made a show of His defeat of death through His resurrection from the dead. Here is where we are certain that He indeed once and for all abolished death and He is the Light of the World, a Light Who has shined through the darkness of death, and the “darkness has not overcome it” (John 1,5b).

Because He has triumphed over death, why should we who believe in Jesus — or anyone else who believes in Jesus — be afraid of anything? There is never any need to pull one’s punches in making a good witness to Him Whose “life is the Light of men” (John 1,4b). He was the Light for Paul, the Light for Timothy, the Light for that girl at Columbine, and our Light as well. And in His light, Paul reminds us that

3) Jesus’ Call Empowers Us. This empowerment consists of “power, love, and a sound mind” (v 7) which was given to us through “a holy calling” in Christ, which has “saved us” (v 9).

All believers share in the power of Jesus’ resurrection, which in Baptism has raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life in Him who conquered death (Romans 6,4). This is the power of Christ’s resurrection that He has called us to faith, and given us the faith by which we believe in Him. This faith is a gift which does not depend on our works. As Paul writes to Titus:

Jesus saved us, not on the deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3,5)

This calling allows us to realize fully the great love by which Jesus loved us. This is the love which impelled Jesus to the Cross in perfect obedience to the Father's will. Even though all other gifts will disappear, the sacrificial love of Jesus will endure forever (1 Corinthians 13,8), because this is the love which saves. This is the love which persuades us to speak the truth in love. The greatest love which we can show others is to point them to Jesus, Who said,

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14,6)

The spirit of a sound mind — by the way, a better translation than “discipline” — is that not only do we believe in this Gospel, this Good News about Jesus, but we can grow in understanding this Gospel and what it means in our daily lives. This is not some mumbo-jumbo or myth, but that which God worked out in history, when the time was right, to secure our salvation. It is a call to remain faithful to sound doctrine and not pull our punches in the face of either persecution or ears which want to be tickled.

This empowerment allows us not to be ashamed in the face of what the world would ridicule.

In the time of Jesus, to be crucified was to endure a shameful death, the death of a criminal. The Jews scorned this and the Gentiles though it laughable. The Cross of Christ is a stumbling block (1 Corinthians 1,23).

Paul suffered on account of his faithfulness in witnessing to Christ, in his faithfulness in making a good confession of the faith. Imprisonment is usually considered to be shameful, but for Paul to be imprisoned meant that he would eventually be vindicated, if not in this

life then in the next. This vindication is clearly seen in Psalm 25:

To Thee, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in Thee I trust;
Do not let me be ashamed;
Do not let my enemies exalt over me.
Indeed, none of those who wait for Thee will be ashamed;
Those who deal treacherously without cause will be
ashamed. (Psalm 25,1-3)

Paul calls Timothy to join him in his suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Timothy is not to pull any punches in defending pure doctrine or to stand steadfast in the faith which has been entrusted to him. Jesus said, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17,17) and He is the Truth.

There is no shame in the fact that Jesus suffered for us. Why? Even though His suffering ended in death, for Him death was not the end. He rose from the dead and lives yet.

There is no shame in suffering for Jesus. Why? To be ashamed is to believe or act on the things that are false and ultimately fail. Jesus has shared with us His triumph over death, over sin, and over the power of the devil and has taken away the sting of death, which is the ultimate failure.

Conclusion. Then as now, the world hates Jesus and hates those who are true to His word. The world hates Jesus because His Word says that they are sinful and in need of a Redeemer. There are enemies within the church who try to tickle ears and water down the pure Gospel that there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. There are false teachers who either try to add to God’s Word, subtract from God’s Word, or somehow twist God’s Word.

Jesus, however, calls us to be faithful. He has called us through His word and sustains us through that word.

In every Absolution, in every Baptism, in every Holy Communion He renews His promise to us that through these means of Grace we receive the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness gives us a spirit of “power, love, and self-control.”

These are the words of encouragement that Paul gave to Timothy and they encouraged Paul and they encouraged Timothy.

This word of encouragement lasts through the ages. It has encouraged millions in a faithful witness to the Gospel — from the early martyrs, to those who have suffered throughout the ages, suffered under a Hitler or Stalin or Mao, suffered under tyranny today, suffered even as that girl at Columbine did.

But suffering is not failure, for Jesus promises us the ultimate victory, the victory over death which He gained for us through His resurrection. Thus in the words of the hymn: “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.” Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

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