

Sermon Proper 23 2019

October 13, 2019

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The sermon text this morning is the Epistle Lesson from Paul's second letter to Timothy.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. As we hear our lessons for this morning, they all have reference for need to be strengthened by the grace that is in our Lord.

First, we heard that account of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi who lost her husband, lost her two sons. You can imagine the anxiety that came to her and her two daughters-in-law. What would they do? I've mentioned before that at that time women would not have found abundant employment on the job market as we see today. Rather, their provision was to be given by their fathers and husbands. What would Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth do? You can imagine the worry in that trial. You can understand why Naomi would decide to return to Bethlehem. You can also understand the devotion that it took for Ruth to not stay with the surer thing, with her people, her family and folk. Of course, if you know the whole story, you know how she ended up finding Boaz, who redeemed her, made her his wife, cared for her and provided for her. A perfect picture of our heavenly Father, who has redeemed us in Christ, made us His bride, cared for and provided for us. All the more, the provision God provided was not for her alone, but for us. This Ruth, if you know the rest of the story—as Paul Harvey would always say—became the grandmother of David, the king through whose line our Christ was born.

But then we have the Gospel Lesson: another account of angst. The ten lepers. And if you know leprosy, you know the trauma of the disease. Thankfully, it's caused by bacteria, so we can treat it now with antibiotics, but then what a horrible thing to suffer. And these ten men are stuck in that life. This would be anxiety ridden to say the least. And of course in this case we see our Lord miraculously healing them. The gracious provision of our God in the midst of our trials.

And as I'm making this connection you can see, then we have Timothy. Paul's writing to Timothy: **You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** If you know the story of Paul and Timothy then you can understand this. I

mentioned last week that this is Pastor Paul writing to Pastor Timothy, and we'll come back to that in a bit. But above and beyond that you have to understand this connection between the two. Paul, the apostle, as I said, who brought Timothy into the Office of the Ministry; Paul the mentor, Timothy the student. But their connection seems to have been extremely deep even in view of that. Paul says it here, "my child." Timothy, this spiritual son to Paul. Timothy this child whose father has mentored him in so much.

So what's the need for the encouragement? Well you see it here. Paul has been arrested. He's in chains for the Gospel. As he says, he is "**bound with chains as a criminal.**" He can't have free course. His ultimate end is unclear. Timothy is appearing to have the risk of losing this mentor. And as we read these insights from Paul to his child in the faith, we get the impression that Timothy was a bit timid. In our reading last week, Paul had to remind Timothy of the great power of the Spirit which was bestowed on him in his ordination. In his first letter, Paul has to charge Timothy not to let the congregation despise him because of his youth. It seems that Timothy could have a tendency to not like to make waves. In view of that, you can understand how much Timothy appreciated having Paul as backup. When something came up in the congregation, there's the comfort that Paul can bring the final word that Timothy can stand on. What will happen to Timothy if Paul dies?

And then, if you read the letter, you see Paul calling Timothy to himself. Additional anxiety. What would happen to the congregation? Will Timothy himself be at risk? We hear in the letter to the Hebrews that Timothy was released from prison, so perhaps he had some foresight that such travel to Paul might lead to this imprisonment.

There's obviously a fair amount of speculation here based on what we know, but the point is you can see it. There is so much for Timothy to have anxiety about. There is so much worry that could envelope his thoughts. And so you can see the encouragement needed. **You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

But this is all Timothy. What about you? Where is your anxiety? How are you Naomi and Ruth? How are you worried about where your provision is coming from? How are you the lepers, how are you suffering in your body and worried about the impending result of that suffering, whether founded like those lepers certainly had founded worrying, or unfounded like we so often fall into? Or where are your worries

in your life? In your relationships? Perhaps you're worried at the loss of a loved one, or perhaps your worry is because of tension with a friend or family member. Or perhaps it's vocational. Where is your worry with your job?

In the midst of this, I am here to speak that word to you, **"You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."** Be strengthened in knowing that Christ has born your sin. Be strengthened in knowing that He has born every sin of yours on the cross and died for it, that He was raised from the dead showing forth the victory of our God over sin, over death, over the devil.

In fact be strengthened in the weakness that you suffer that this grace of Christ is power under weakness, that our God is the God whose power is made perfect in weakness. Be strengthened in knowing that when you are weak, when you can't bear more, when the weight feels as though it's bearing down on you and you're collapsing under the it, when all you can do is cry out in prayer to God for strength and an end to it, it's there that He shines forth the most. Why? Because it's there that your faith is most reliant on him. It's there that you have to trust in Him the most and in yourself the least.

You see I've been there, and I know those are the times when you come to the rail and you hear those words of forgiveness and it's most strengthening because, even though your thoughts are garbled with the anxieties around you, your spirit hears those promises and is heartened for continuing. That's when the preaching doesn't sink into your brain, but to your heart, to the core of your being, sometimes not even cognitively, but in a way that's greater. Yes, **my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus**

And as I make this point about preaching and the Lord's Supper, I want to come back to this point I keep making about this being from Pastor Paul to Pastor Timothy. Look at what Paul says as he finishes this encouragement. He says to Timothy, be strengthened. And as you're strengthened, **"what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."** What's he saying there? He's telling Timothy, you're a pastor, a bishop. Teach other pastors who can sustain the church. In fact this word for entrusting there is the Greek equivalent of *traditio*, where we get tradition. Tradition this Gospel to others who can tradition it to others.

What's my point? It's that in the midst of these anxieties, God has given you something. He has given you the Church. He has given you broken men who proclaim

the forgiveness of your sins to you. And I get that this is most challenging in those times when the pastor is the source of your anxiety, as sadly happens. Some of you have probably experienced that at some point or another. If not you see that in things like the scandal in the Roman Catholic Church with the priests there. But in the midst of that God still works. He still gives you His gifts. His absolution is still from Him. His body and blood is still His, still under that bread and wine for your forgiveness, and for the promise that He is with you always unto the end of the age. Still the promise for you, for your care. Think about what that Word is saying to you.

Think also about how that Word creates what we have here. I've mentioned a number of times how much I appreciate how much you all care for each other. Some of you have mentioned how you think of Grace as your family. And it is. God, through this Word gives us the gift of family in Him here. Sometimes, like all families, there might be tension or disagreements. But there is this care. I encourage you in that, be that care always for each other. Be that support in the anxiety for each other. Do that, because this is how God gives us the ability to endure our trials, through His family in the Church, and by that Word spoken by His servants.

That's what Paul is telling Timothy, and that's what the Church has handed down to you: the beauty of that Word that is not bound. Paul can be bound, you could be bound, I as a preacher and teacher of that Word could be bound. But the Word can and will reign free. And in the midst of that God brings salvation to you, to His elect, to His chosen before the foundation of the world.

With all of this in mind, then I say the same to you, **be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** And be strengthened in that saying that is trustworthy. **If we have died with him, we will also live with him.** And you have died with Him in Baptism. **If we endure, we will also reign with him.** By His Word and the strength of that Word you will endure. **If we deny him, he also will deny us.** Be warned and pray for the grace to never deny Him. **If we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.** And there is the strength in all of it. You are His, you are joined to Him, you are a part of the body of His Son. He cannot deny Himself. And so there is your comfort in your trial. God will not, God cannot deny Himself, and He will always be faithful to you in Christ. Be strengthened, then Christians, by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Amen.