

The Twenty-Second Sunday of Pentecost

October 16, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness and set us free from all adversities that, under your protection, we may serve you with true devotion and holy deeds; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Alleluia! (Ephesians 2:10)

Sermon Text: 2 Timothy 1:8-14

Sheer raw power. Violent turbulence. Constant bombardment. Uncertainty. Chaos. Fear. Desperation. Fatigue. An odd desire to quit mixed with the determination to persevere. A picture can say a thousand words—and perhaps I would run out of time for all the words that could describe the picture of a roaring ocean crashing into the single white pillar of a lighthouse.

Close your eyes and imagine the sight. There the lighthouse stands— all by itself, towering high above any other rock or cliff. No one seems to be there and still raging waters engulf the beach, the rocky coast, and everything around it. Even though the lighthouse reaches high into the sky, each monstrous wave tries to reach its powerful hand higher in an attempt to tear it down. After each wave falls back into the ocean, the lighthouse still stands peacefully even though unrest swirls all around it.

Absolutely breathtaking— and yet a little frightening. You do not know how long (or much longer) that lighthouse will stand. Will the next wave crush it? Will the lighthouse finally be so exhausted that it just collapses into the chaotic mess?

You get drawn into such a picture— because, in a way, the picture feels so relatable. Watery waves are not battering you, but you may feel exhausted from having to defend

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

^{4:1} In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

your belief in an unseen God for the millionth time. One scientific argument after another challenges your conviction that *God the Father is the Maker of heaven and earth* (from the Apostle's Creed/Belief). You live in a society which constantly tears away at morality— what is acceptable (right) and what is morally wrong— and still you see that even the most ungodly of your friends really have a pleasant life. Why bother to **CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED?**

I am not sure what was going through young Pastor Timothy's mind. I do know he read these words. Five fingers clutch this second letter— and not just any plain old, generic letter, but the last letter he would ever read from his good friend, mentor, and pastor, Paul. As most of Paul's letters do, it starts with a wonderful greeting: *Grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* ([1:2](#)).

Uplifting words, but a dark cloud still rests over this letter. Remember, Paul is sitting on death-row ([1:8](#); [4:6-8](#)). At one time he was on trial, but now his trial is over. No appeals. No daring plan to escape. Just waiting for the day when a sword will meet his neck. The most gut-wrenching thing of all is that Paul is innocent! He paid his taxes. He respected the Roman government. Still, he is going to be executed. Why? Because he shared his faith and very few wanted to hear it.

So, why is Paul telling you this? He is not simply writing down the most recent events happening in his life. Rather, he tells you, a believer, what you can expect because you cling to that same gospel he does. **For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.** Your reading says “people”— but who are those people? Do you have a mental picture of who they are? ... where they work? ... what they say? Paul is not thinking about criminals or predators or gang leaders. His first thought is not about the atheist who does not believe there is a god; he is not describing people who have no relationship with God. Paul describes people who have Bibles, who stand in churches, and who end their messages with “This is the Word of God.”

You see, Paul knows plenty of people looked and sounded like good pastors, but their teachings rejected sound doctrine (or correct teachings). Already by 50AD, people with Bibles claimed that Jesus never rose from the dead and that his body is still in a grave. They told people to live however they wanted— get drunk, sleep around, indulge in excess, lie, cheat, steal— because that type of behavior does not anger God. They even went so far as to teach that Jesus is created by God, that he is a good teacher, but that he is not the Son of God who saved the world from their sins. (This teaching is called: *Gnosticism*).

More and more people were following these wrong teachings. In fact, they already had made up their minds on what they wanted to believe and now they were looking for the teacher to “scratch the itch” of what they already wanted to hear. I mean, Paul says: **[T]o suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.**

This is where it gets personal. You see, Paul is not wagging a finger at other people and saying: “Look at how foolish they are! Look how right you are!” No— Paul points a finger at you. He gives you a command: **CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED!**

A little while ago, one of you told me about your brother who was dealing with heart problems. The brother had learned that if you are not healthy, you see the doctor. So, he went to the doctor. Now, when the doctor told him to stop eating fatty foods, the brother found a new doctor; he wanted to eat whatever he wanted. When the new doctor told him to exercise more, he found a newer doctor because he did not want to exercise. When the newer doctor told him to continue eating whatever he wanted and to continue sitting around, he was satisfied. He wanted to hear that.

You see, we may be wise enough to know our world is not perfect and that we are not perfect. Yet, when God's Word strikes a little too close to home, well, that is when you may want to hear words with which you already agree. God uses Scripture to outline his plan for unconditional love and intimacy between one man and one woman in marriage. How quickly you can fire back: "Well, God does not understand my emotions right now." God tells you to trust him and his control of the world— trust him more than whoever is running for political office ([Psalm 118:8-9](#)). Still, you could say: "Yes, but if the wrong person is elected, who will make sure I have money for retirement?" God paints the grim picture: *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life* ([Romans 6:23](#)). How our hearts can find that message boring! You may even feel that you want to hear a more exciting, more relevant truth than the fact that the sins you have committed this past week are forgiven!

When God's Word strikes a little too close to home, we may want to hear someone say what we want to hear. Did you hear what people are really doing when they scratch the itching things they want to hear? Paul says they **turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths**. If God does not say it, then it is not true—regardless of how much you want your personal beliefs to be true! The Bible is not sometimes true. Paul does not say Christianity is one of many different truths out there. No— God's Word is the one and only truth. Here is the question: If you are basing your beliefs on something God has not said, then who are you listening to?

Our reading shakes us awake— and that is intentional. Did you catch the very first word in the reading? "**But, as for you...**" No other three letters strike such a contrast. Even though masses rush off to find teachers who reinforce wrong beliefs, you are not to join with them. You are to be different because God has made you different.

[F]rom infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. As you read the Bible, you will notice two major truths. *All have sinned—and continue falling short of God's glory* ([Romans 3:23](#)). From Adam and Eve, to Moses, to king David, to the Twelve disciples, you see the ugly truth replayed over and over again. *All have turned away; there is no one who does good* ([Psalm 14:1-3](#)). You and me included. You can gather up teachers who say the things you want to hear about the next president or how you should be nicer to each other— and yet God starts with his relationship with you. You may want to cover up any need for a Savior; you may justify your hurtful choices. No matter how little you want to hear that, no

matter how dull and repetitive that sounds to you, despite the fact the world mocks this recurring topic of “sin,” “bad,” “wrong,” the truth is sin brings death.

Yet, the Scriptures reveal that a Savior has freed you from the wages of sin. *All are justified* (declared “not guilty”) *by the redemption that came by Christ Jesus* ([Romans 3:24](#)). This truth **makes you wise for salvation**. You do not have to guess what happens after death. You do not have to make up the feel-good story that everyone goes to heaven. You know heaven is your home because God himself says that he gave his Son to remove the penalty for your sin. With that, God solves the biggest crisis you face in life. Death will come, but Jesus gives you victory over death.

You are different because God has called you from listening to the lies of this world and has turned your ears to listen to his holy Scripture. Through baptism and through the strengthening of his body and blood in Holy Communion, God equips you and works in you the desire to **CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED!**

Yes, sometimes you may feel like that lighthouse being battered by waves. You may feel exhausted from having to defend your belief in an unseen God for the millionth time. One scientific argument after another challenges your conviction that *God the Father is the Maker of heaven and earth* (from the Apostle’s Creed/Belief). You live in a society which constantly tears away at morality— what is acceptable (right) and what is morally wrong— and still you see that even the most ungodly of your friends really have a pleasant-looking life. You can believe that by leaving God behind everything only gets better.

But... you are different. You do not change convictions because the masses are doing so. You do not change what you believe just because it seems outdated— and understand why. It is not because you have some blind, stubborn allegiance to the teachings of a church. It is because the Holy Scriptures have worked in your heart and have convinced you that the things God has said are true. More than that, the Holy Scriptures have taught you that one thing never changes: your Jesus has rescued you from the depravity of your sin. The Holy Scriptures you cling to are not one of many teachings, they the teachings of your God—a God who has prepared eternity for you and a God who prepares you now for eternity.

Keeping his trust centered squarely on those Holy Scriptures delivered Paul safely to his heavenly home. Those same Scriptures are the only teaching that guarantees you eternal life in Jesus. **CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED!**