

October 24, 2021 A Different Perspective 2 Timothy 1:3-12

This is one of those passages in the New Testament, to which I turn when I am tempted to be down. The Church, using that term in its widest sense, that great body of Christians who can be found in communities large and small, from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland, from the Arctic waters to the North, to the Canadian border with the USA in the south is in decline. Serious decline. Ministers in our own denomination are dropping out of service. Congregations are shutting down, and church buildings are being sold. It becomes easy to be discouraged.

The apostle Paul was in jail when he wrote the second letter to Timothy. He has arrived in Rome, and because Paul has a head on his shoulders, he has analyzed his situation. This time he concludes there will be no escape. He understands the Empire, which at this stage is singularly anti-Christian. When Paul began his journey, Rome tended to think these Jesus followers were just a weird group of Jews. But that time has passed. Rome understands that these disciples of Jesus are trying to convert everyone they meet. It is a pillar of the Empire. There will only be one religion tolerated: that of the official Roman gods.

Paul understands. As he writes to Timothy, he remembers time they shared. He remembers Timothy's "sincere faith," and the faith of Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and Timothy's mother Eunice. Timothy professed his own faith

under the ministry of Paul. Paul laid hands on him and prayed over him. And you can count on it, there was a celebration over that service of confirmation, as Timothy embraced, a life changing confession of faith. Paul urges Timothy to fan the gift of his faith into a flame that burns, bringing warmth and meaning to his life offered in the service of the Gospel, and other people, in the name of Jesus.

These days when Barbara and I are at the farmhouse we rise to chilly mornings. My first task is to start a fire in the wood stove. I light the paper and the first flames lick at the kindling. Sometimes I blow on the sparks to help the fire take. And then I add heavier pieces of wood, waiting for that magic moment when you start to feel the warmth of the fire, and the ecofan, sitting on the stove begins to turn, and circulate the heat among us.

One thing Paul is certain of: his current suffering will in all probability end in his being executed. From the world's point of view Paul is a fool. He refuses to recant. The Roman soldiers who are chained to him, that he might not escape become the people to whom he speaks concerning Jesus. Paul realizes there will come a time when the Empire will pass away into the dim memory of history. And he is convinced the Gospel of God's amazing grace, will not pass away, that it has to do with eternal life, and will continually become more and more important as a force for good, and reason to praise God.

Are these times tough for believers? Yes, they are. Are we tempted to wish we could go back and do some things differently than we did? Yes we are. But in life what has been done, is factual. We find ourselves where we are. Phygelus and Hermogenes were good friends of Paul, brothers in the faith. They have deserted Paul along with many others, attempting to survive in tough times by blending in with the Empire. Paul refuses to do so. He urges Timothy to refuse to do so. He urges us to refuse to accept the values of our culture, and to cling to the Gospel Jesus shared and shares in our midst. We remember Paul because of this different perspective he has on everything going on in his world including his pain, which will lead to his death.

His message to Timothy in verse 8 is “join with me in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.” He goes on in verse 9, “who has saved us and called us to a holy life...not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” And verse 10, “But it now has been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Here is the perspective of Paul. The marvelous words of verse 12. “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet, I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced (persuaded), that he is able to guard that which I have entrusted to him for that day.” I am suggesting that

regardless of what may appear to happen in the days, the weeks, the months, the years that unfold before us in the future, these are words to remember on the anniversary of this congregation. These are words to hang on to and repeat in our minds and hearts, as we continue to do the work of being the church in this place.

“I am not ashamed.” What was it Paul was not ashamed of? It was as simple and as profound as this: no matter the consequences, and he knew there would be consequences, he is not ashamed to be accused of being...a Christian. A disciple of Jesus. An apostle of Jesus. A ringleader in the Christian cause. I have told you before, the word Christian only appears in the New Testament 3 times. In each case it a charge of criminality, in a world where faith is spurned, and religion is seen as hollow tradition. Paul is not ashamed to be associated with Jesus. Neither am I. I have worn this cross for 50 years as a sign and a symbol that I stand with the crucified one. Am I good? Perfect? No. No. I am at best a sinful man forgiven by God through the reality that I believe in Jesus.

“I know who it is I believe.” I believe Jesus when Jesus says “I and my Father are one.”(John 10:30) I am convinced, persuaded, that it is true. That it will always be true no matter what happens to me or to the world around me.

“Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them

out of my hand.” (John 10:27-28) I am convinced, persuaded that Jesus can keep what I have entrusted him with...my life. That there will indeed come a day when I do not recover from the ravages of age, or sickness that befalls me. And that as I breathe my last breath, I will see Jesus, even as HE promised. (John 16:22). Jesus said to the disciples who followed HIM, “I will see you again, and you will rejoice, and no man will take away your joy.”

On this day we celebrate those who have rejoiced to be in this place where we sit and stand and worship, praising God. Leaning on Jesus. Hoping in Jesus. Rejoicing that HE was raised from the dead on the 3rd day. Sunday morning is that 3rd day. So...how indeed shall we face the future and its seeming uncertainty? With this proclamation concerning our faith in Jesus. “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, (not man, not an organization, not even the church). I have believed Jesus, and am convinced that HE is able to guard what I have entrusted to HIM, for that day.”

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for time we have shared in the place, in worship, praising your name, hearing your word, read and preached. We pray before you because you are the Lord God who made what was made, including ourselves. Pour your Spirit upon us and into our midst that we might rejoice before you, being faithful servants and witnesses. In your holy name we ask this. Amen