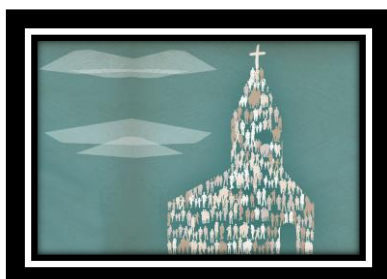


“The church rekindled – 1st and 2nd Timothy”

October 2, 2022

World Communion Sunday



God calls us to worship:

Responsive reading: Psalm 34:1-8

Hymn: #350 “To God be the glory”

We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:

Prayers of Praise and supplication (*Please remain standing*):

Gracious and Generous God,
you spread a banquet table and make room for all to come:
friend and foe, healed and sick, hopeful and hopeless.
You feed our desires with goodness
and fill our longing with steadfast love.
We worship you with grateful praise,
together with all your people, here and everywhere,
who break bread at your table and who share the cup.
We celebrate our life together in Christ
and offer our love and loyalty to you, O God,
Source of all goodness,
through Jesus Christ, who shares our flesh,
and your Holy Spirit who prays within us.

Prayers of Confession (*Please be seated; said in unison*):

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.

Assurance of grace: 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:5

(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is: "**His love endures forever.**")

God speaks to us:

Unison prayer for illumination:

**Living God,
to turn away from you is to fall
and to turn towards you is to rise.
By the power of your Spirit,
reform your church
and help us to hear your word
in ways that we will understand it truly;
so that in understanding we may trust fully;
and that in trusting we may follow you always.
Give us, dear God,
your help in all our responsibilities;
your guidance in all our uncertainties;
and your wisdom in all our discerning.
Where we are corrupt, purify us.
Where we are in error, direct us.
Where we are divided, reunite us.
And use your church to your glory
and the service of your people,
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.¹**

¹ A prayer for the church from the writings of the Reformers.

Ministries within the household of God

The apostle Paul urged the young pastor Timothy to not be swayed by teachers within the Christian assembly who were leading the flock astray by promoting false doctrine concerning: the person and work of the Messiah Jesus, the authority and use of scripture, and “how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”²

What is of first importance in this effort, he wrote, is that the church of the living God be a community at prayer – making intercessions, supplications, and thanksgivings for everyone. Secondly, it is a community of care in which the needs of the vulnerable are met by sharing the resources of the community – money, food, clothing, shelter; time, faith, prayer, hope.

Today, we’ll see that what is also of importance for the church to be prepared to be rekindled by the Holy Spirit, is the way in which the community is organized and governed.

READ 1ST TIMOTHY 3:1-13 (bishops and deacons);

4:1-10, (11-16) (teaching elder/pastor);

- *“seared with a hot iron”*
 - *picture branding iron being pressed into flesh*
 - = *nerve damage in that area of the body*
 - = *desensitized/numb to own actions*
 - = *these people have almost unknowingly renounced the faith and have been misrepresenting Christ and the living God because of their continual following and believing the lies of the false teachers; so much so that they are desensitized to the lies, they don't realize that they are believing things that aren't true about Jesus, scripture, and Christian behaviour; because of the work of the false teachers, the people's consciences are numbed to God's truth.*

5:17-22 (elders – teaching and ruling).

- *Verse 17 – here we get the basis of our system in which we have **ruling** elders who are responsible for making the decisions by which a local congregation lives and ministers and who have the responsibility of exercising discipline when necessary, and **teaching** elders who have the responsibility of reading the Word of God in public, teaching the scriptures, teaching the faith, and encouraging all members of the household of God in their discipleship.*

² 1st Timothy 3:15

Why is this important?

In the words of the “Form of Presbyterian Church Government” agreed upon by the Westminster Divines in 1645, the Lord has appointed particular offices and officers:

...for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints...

And, in the more recent words of “Living Faith” (1989):

*The Lord continues his ministry in and through the church...
Through the church God **orders** this ministry by calling some to special tasks in the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.³*

To better equip the church to continue His ministry and to edify the members thereof in a way that is decent and in good order, thus bearing witness that the God who created the cosmos is a God of order and peace and that Jesus is not only the Saviour of humankind but is King of kings and head of his church, Christ has organized his church and appointed offices to govern it appropriately.

The apostle Paul shone his spotlight on four such offices, or, ministries: Bishop, Deacon, Servant/Minister of the Word and Sacrament, and Elder.

The offices described:

Ever since the reformation, churches have continued to divide, separate, and create new denominations. The name chosen by a denomination reflects what they consider to be an essential element of their denominational identity.

Baptists are so-named for their practice of believers’ baptism and the place that the sacrament of baptism has in their collective identity.

Christian Reformed Church is so-named for their theological heritage.

United Church of Canada’s name reflects the historical union in June, 1925 that gave rise to the denomination.

Roman Catholic Church is named for the historic reality that they were once the universal church (hence, “catholic”) whose centre of power was in Rome.

³ *Living Faith*, 7.2.1, 7.2.2

I know of two Christian denominations whose names are derived from their system of governance. One is the Episcopalian church. Its system of government revolves around Bishops, whose Greek name is *episkopé*.

This is the first office, or ministry, which Paul addressed.

Bishops:

The office of the bishop, or the *episkopé*, is that of a general overseer. The bishop's job is to oversee all the congregations within their jurisdiction. The bishop ensures that each congregation is being served by a teacher/pastor who is upholding the "sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" revealed in the Old and New Testaments of scripture. They ensure that the sacraments are being rightly administered, that the elders of congregations – teaching and ruling were properly teaching, demonstrating, and disciplining behaviour becoming members of the household of God. The bishop also ensures that the needs of the impoverished, vulnerable, and ill are being met by the local congregation.

The bishop is to be a general overseer of the congregations within their geographical jurisdiction.

Elders:

The other denomination whose name is derived from its system of government, is the Presbyterian Church – whether it be in Canada, in the United States, in Australia, in Cuba, or elsewhere. The Presbyterian Church is ruled by elders (which is a translation of the Greek word *presbyter*). *Presbyters* are organized into groups called *courts*. At the local level, the elders'/presbyters court of a congregation is the Session, at a regional level it's the Presbytery, and at a denominational level it's the General Assembly (i.e., the general assembly of elders/presbyters.)

Presbyters/elders have the role of ruling local congregations. Our *Book of Forms* describes the job of the elder thusly:

*establish good order and providing for the pastoral care of the congregation. All who are members are subject to the authority and discipline of the session. responsible for supervision and oversight of **all** associations of members and adherents connected with the congregation. ... responsible for **all** policy and procedures with respect to the use of the church buildings and property. ... The*

*session shall assign the names of all members and adherents to the elders who shall **keep a list** of the names and addresses of those assigned to them, and shall cultivate a personal relationship with those persons through visiting, counselling, and encouraging them in the Christian life.⁴*

So, as a presbyterian congregation, we are governed by presbyters/elders and organized into courts of presbyters. We don't have bishops. Yet, Paul began his discussion with placing bishops of first importance in the good governing of the household of God. Are we, therefore guilty of apostasy? Are we guilty of the same sin as those false teachers who were leading the Ephesian congregations astray? Or as the members thereof whose consciences had become desensitized to their apostasy?

Before we jump to that conclusion, let's reconsider the purpose of the office of bishop.

The bishop is an overseer of the congregations within their geographical bounds ensuring that teachers are in place who uphold sound doctrine according to the Word of God, that sacraments are being rightly administered, that the needs of the vulnerable are being met.

Presbyteries are comprised of representative presbyters (or, elders) from each congregation within its bounds. One teaching and one ruling elder for each congregation. The role of the Presbytery is to regularly meet to ensure that all congregations within its territory are cared for. That each congregation has a pastor who adheres to sound, faithful doctrine. That sacraments are being rightly administered, and that proper behaviour is being taught, disciplined, and modelled by the elders of each congregation.

On the role of Presbyteries, the *Book of Forms* remains unchanged from the *Second Book of Discipline* written by the "six Johns" – one of whom being John Knox – in 1578 after Mary, Queen of Scots abdicated her throne and opened the door to a protestant Scotland:

It pertains to the presbytery to take heed that the Word of God is purely preached within its bounds, the sacraments rightly administered, the discipline rightly maintained, and the ecclesiastical goods uncorruptly distributed. ... To the presbytery belongs the care and good order of the churches within the bounds.⁵

⁴ *Book of Forms*, 109

⁵ *Book of Forms*, 198, 200

So, the *presbytery* has the same role as the office of bishop.

The *presbytery* is a type of corporate *bishop*.

So, we can be encouraged that we are mostly in agreement with the teaching of the Word of God concerning the offices which the Lord has assigned so that his church can be prepared to be rekindled by the Holy Spirit!

We have ruling elders, a teaching elder (which we call the Minister of Word and Sacrament, or, the pastor), and a bishop in the guise of the presbytery.

We lack, however, a Deacon's Court.

Deacons:

The deacon's role evolved in the early church and settled into what we might call a ministry of kindness, or, a ministry of mercy. In the same line of reasoning as the widow's list about which we talked last week, the deacon's ministry is to manage and distribute resources (whether it be tangible resources such as food, clothing, and money, or intangible resources such as prayer, time spent visiting and helping, faith, and hope) to those who had need.

In our particular congregational context at Knox-Moore and, until not too long ago, at St. Andrew's, Mooretown, the Ladies' Aide has by tradition assumed some of the deacons' duties. Through the care convenor, they provide a ministry of care by cards, seasonal care packages, phone calls when needed, and keeping track of who within the congregation is in a particularly vulnerable place.

The Board of Managers has assumed the place of the Deacons' Court in managing the congregation's physical assets. And, the elders attempt to visit and provide pastoral care as needed.

Through the ministry of the Ladies' Aide, Board of Managers, and elders, we do try and accomplish the role of the deacons. However, for the sake of effective and focussed ministry, I wonder if it wouldn't be expedient for us to establish a formal deacon's court wherein the focus of managing assets is to support the ministry of mercy and those ordained as deacons have the focussed role of providing tangible and intangible help in the name of Christ to those whose names are on "the list."

Character matters:

It is worth noting that, rather than describing the particular functions of the various offices – as we have done today, Paul exerted most of his energy on the character of those who qualify to serve in the ministries.

Remember: some of the false teachers had come from positions of leadership *within* the church. They weren't necessarily outsiders trying to undermine the work of the church. They were preachers, pastors, and elders who had been duly elected, yet had become numb to what is right and wrong according to the Word of God.

The church represents the Triune God in our age. We are the body of Christ in the here-and-now. What's at stake, therefore, is the glory of God – the revelation in our societies of the true character of the Living God.

It is, therefore, critical the way we organize our communities of Christ's disciples is in obedience to His Word and that "no one is ordained hastily" but that careful prayer and discernment be applied before electing elders or deacons; in preparing decisions at Presbytery; and in calling pastors.

For the health of our souls, the good of our societies, and the glory of God.
Amen.

Hymn: #592 "I, the Lord of sea and sky"

We respond in thanksgiving, intercession, and faith:

Offering:

Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**
Prayer of dedication

The Sacrament of Holy Communion:

Hymn: #543 "Here, O my Lord, I see thee" (verses 1-3)

Invitation to the Lord's Table

The Apostles' Creed

The Great Thanksgiving (#564)

The Breaking of Bread

The Communion

Prayer

Hymn: #543 "Here, O my Lord, I see thee" (verses 4-7)

God sends us with God's blessing:

Benediction

Congregation sings "Amen"