

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

October 23, 2022

God calls us to worship:

Responsive reading: Psalm 84:1-7

Hymn: #321 “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:

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

Creating God,
the mountains you raised
reflect your strength and majesty.
Sunrise and sunset frame the day with your light and joy.
Fields bursting with grain and trees coloured with autumn glory
sing of your steadfast love.
Pictures from the depth of space give a glimpse of your infinity,
yet in Christ you have walked the humble earth.
You alone are worthy of our praise.
You alone give us hope.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you,
and join our voices to those of every precious thing
to wonder at your mystery and majesty.

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

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
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:

Prayer for illumination

Reading of Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1-19

(The response to “This is the word of the Lord” is “**Thanks be to God.**”)

Strong in the grace of Christ

Last week we began listening for God’s Word as it has been preserved in the apostle Paul’s second letter to Timothy. Our focus was on the trust that the church prepared to be rekindled by the Holy Spirit is a community whose members are not ashamed of the gospel.

Today we’ll learn how the courage to unashamedly make God and the gospel known in our world comes not from our selves but from being strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

To that end, let us listen for God’s word to us as it has been handed down in 2nd Timothy 2:1-19.

READ.

Timothy was a pastor in the city of Ephesus. This was one of the most affluent and powerful cities of the day. Indeed, it would probably rival some of our cities. It had a population of nearly 250,000 people. It was a hub of business, politics, culture, and thought. Its theatre – which almost all major cities had, and which were used for staging plays that portrayed the lives of the Greek and Roman gods as well as propagating the ideals of the Greco-Roman culture – could seat an estimated 25,000 people.

It was also the centre of the worship of the fertility goddess and protector Artemis. The temple to Artemis is one of the seven wonders of the world. The priests who served therein were responsible for maintaining the purity of Artemis worship around the world. Ephesus was to the Artemis religion what Vatican City is to the Roman Catholic Church!

In addition, Ephesus was the epicentre for emperor worship. It was here the emperor Domitian declared himself a god.

If you did not bow before Domitian and pay your tribute to Artemis, you were likely to be executed. In fact, this city became the starting point of state-sanctioned, violent persecution against Christians.

So, amid this affluent, political, cultural, powerful city with its centres for advanced thinking and temples to its powerful yet ultimately fake gods, Timothy was charged with teaching the Word of God and encouraging the faithful to walk in ways

consistent with the glorious gospel of the blessed God in a culture that saw the Christian church as either irrelevant or a threat.

Paul, writing this letter from prison on account of his own ministry, knew that the Christian witness would only endure in such a context by the grace of Christ Jesus.

So, he urged Timothy, to continue his work despite disappointments and the seeming lack of tangible results, but to do so not in his own strength, but in the strength of the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Paul gave three analogies to explain what he meant:

A soldier.

An athlete.

A farmer.

A soldier may not know the complete battle plans. They don't need to. But a good soldier does need to be convinced of the cause. And they need to trust their officers.

An athlete, to win honourably, plays by the rules. Whether they like the rules or not, if they want to win with honour, they recognize the authority of the governing body, and they play by the rules.

And a farmer labours with dedication. They plant the seed and devote their time to weeding and watering; to feeding and doctoring their livestock; to building and maintaining their buildings and machinery. With no immediately obvious reward, they dedicate themselves to their work.

So, we have *conviction* of the cause, *trust* in the officers, *obedience* to the rules, and *dedication* to the work.

Conviction, trust, obedience, and dedication.

These are four qualities of strength in the grace that is in Christ Jesus which Paul encouraged Timothy to embody.

As the church; as members of the household of God; as the body of Christ in the world, our *cause* is to make known the one living and triune God and his kingdom.

Amid the city of Ephesus, Paul urged Timothy to remind the faithful that these gods are nothing more than creations of human imagination. That, as he wrote in 1st Timothy:

*There is **one** God
and there is **one** mediator between God and humankind: Jesus
who is **the** Messiah, the descendant of David
who gave his life a ransom for all,
and who was raised from the dead
foreshadowing what awaits all God's creation.*

It took conviction to stand before the temple of Artemis, the altar to the emperor, the centres of advanced thinking and proclaim: No. None of this is God. There is one Living God who creates, protects, and sustains and there is one mediator between God and humankind: Jesus.

The equivalent today would be to insist when having conversations with friends or family, or when navigating the school curriculum, or when you cast your vote, or when making decisions concerning the structure and theology of the Church, to insist that there *is* a God, and that there is *one* God, and that there is *one* way to fellowship with this God and that is Jesus of Nazareth.

It is not hard to imagine how that would be received in our Canadian culture today!

The church prepared to be rekindled by the Spirit of God is a community whose members have conviction in the cause.

So, we have a *cause*.

And, we have a *rule book*. We call it the covenants. The terms of which are preserved for us in the Old and New Testaments of the Word of God.

We have an *officer*. Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, the descendant of David who was crucified for sin and raised from the dead.

In his faithfulness we can place our trust.

God once made a promise to be faithful to His creation. He said: "I will be your God." That promise He extends to us through Christ: "The Lord knows who are his."

Whether 135 souls gather on Sunday morning, or 35, or 5 the Lord knows who are his. And He will remain faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Our *cause* is to make known the one living and triune God and his kingdom.

Our *rule book* is the Word of God.

Our *officer* is Jesus, the Messiah who is worthy of our trust.

Which brings us to our *work*.

God's grace is expressed in covenants: a formalized relationship with humanity. God made his covenant with Adam and Eve and renewed it through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and finally Jesus. In the covenant God promises His faithfulness and we respond with ours. "I will be your God" he promised Abraham and his descendants, "and you will be my people."

The covenant holds in Christ: "The Lord knows who are his" and "Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness."

The second part of the covenant concerns the human response to God's grace.

Our *work* is to dedicate ourselves to the cause; to devote ourselves to making known the one living and triune God and his kingdom, to shape our lives according to His will and wisdom, to turn away from wickedness trusting that the mission is fulfilled through obedience to the Word of God, whether we can see the results in this age or not.

That covenant is inscribed on the foundation of Christ's church in every age, and it will sustain the church until Christ returns: "The Lord knows who are his" and "Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness."

So, let us be strong – not in numbers, dollars, or programs – but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Let us have conviction in the cause, trust our Lord and *His* ways, obey *His* word, and work. Whether the times are encouraging or not, dedicate yourself to your work of revealing the living and triune God in the societies in which we live.

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

We respond by affirming our faith, offering our tithes, and prayer:

Hymn: #324 "Great is thy faithfulness"

Apostles' Creed (*see bulletin insert for text*)

Let us return to God the offerings of our lives.

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

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Just and merciful God,

we lift our eyes to you in hope and gratitude.

When the world around us seems troubling,

we are grateful for your steadfast love.

Thank you for your Spirit at work in all times and places,

calling out the best in your people,

showing us when we must repent,

opening paths to reconciliation where we have offended.

We pray for justice for the earth:

Protect those creatures and habitats that our way of life is threatening.

Protect those communities and island nations at risk from climate change.

Open our eyes to see how we can live more responsibly

and change our hearts to know we must.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

We pray for justice among the nations:

Create more generous sharing of resources

between countries with good harvests and those depleted by famine.

Where resources are extracted for export,

protect brave advocates for fair wages and environmental protection.

And where there is aggression and intimidation between nations,

raise up the willingness to make peace and settle differences fairly.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

We pray for justice in our court systems:

Guide those who judge and defend to serve with integrity,

that those who are accused may receive fair trials,

and that those who have been wronged or harmed are restored to fullness of life.

Grant those who are convicted humane treatment

so that your Spirit may lead them to rehabilitated potential.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

We pray for justice in the work place:

May those who work for others be treated with dignity and earn a fair wage.

May all who create that work earn a fair return.
Create equity and respect between those of different backgrounds and identities
and guide young people to opportunities to develop their gifts.

Hold a few seconds of silence.

God, we all need some kinds of healing in our lives:
We remember before you those struggling with illness of body, mind or spirit,
those waiting for diagnosis or treatment,
and all whose health challenges are invisible to others.

(Keep silence for 15 – 20 seconds)

We remember Chanie Wenjack, who died of hunger and exposure on this day
in 1966 after running away from Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School,
which The Presbyterian Church in Canada operated. We pray for Survivors and
all those who carry deep pain and trauma from Residential Schools.

Your Spirit prays within us, O God, even when we cannot find the right words.
So hear us this day and answer us in ways that encourage our faith and change
the world for the good, for the sake of Jesus Christ who taught us this prayer:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: #365 "This is the threefold truth"

God sends us with God's blessing:

Benediction

Congregation sings "Amen"