

THE PRECIOUS AND POWERFUL GOSPEL

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

October 6, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *Paul's Second Letter to Timothy*, chapter 1, verses 1 through 14. It is on page 842 of the pew Bible. 2 Timothy is one of my personal favorites. In this letter we get a personal look into Paul's mind and what gave him the power to suffer. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From 2 Timothy 1, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus,

² To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, ¹¹ for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, ¹² which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. ¹³ Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of God is a special kind of communication. It's in a category by itself. There really is nothing else like it.

Back in high school I competed in speech. There were several events, but only three where you would prepare and deliver your own speech: speech to inform, speech to persuade, and speech to entertain. These categories gave me a framework for how to classify different types of communication. Even in casual conversation, our speech is usually intended to do one of these

three things. So which of these categories would the Word of God fit into? Does it inform? Does it persuade? Or does it entertain?

And I should probably define what I mean by “the Word of God.” Primarily, I mean the words of Scripture—the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. But second, I also mean the preaching of the Word. Insofar as a sermon accurately proclaims the truth of Scripture, it is rightly called the Word of God. This doesn’t mean everything we call a sermon is necessarily the Word of God, but a good sermon—that is a sermon that is what God commands it to be—can rightly be called “the Word of God.” Sermons derive this status from Scripture when Scripture commands us to “preach the Word” (4:2). We are commanded, not simply to *read* it, but also to *preach* it.

So we have these two forms of the Word of God: the written Word, which is primary, and the preached Word, which derives its power and authority from the written Word. Both of these are what I mean today when I use the phrase “Word of God.”

So which category of speech does the Word of God fit into: speech to inform, speech to persuade, or speech to entertain?

At various times it does all three of these things. Sometimes it informs us of historical or theological truth. Sometimes it persuades us to think or behave a certain way. And sometimes it entertains us; it might warm our hearts or even make us laugh out loud. At various times it may fit into any one of these three categories. Most of the time we probably think of it as speech to inform or speech to persuade. This is probably the way we often approach the Word of God. Rarely do you come to church or open your Bibles with the goal of being entertained. If you do, you are probably left wanting. More often, I would guess we open your Bibles or come to church with the goal of being *informed* of what is true or *persuaded* to live and think the way God desires. And this is fine. We should be informed and persuaded by the Word of God, but if this is really how we think of Word of God, we have an insufficient view of the Word.

The Word of God has a category all its own—one that transcends information, persuasion, or entertainment. So one of my goals today is to persuade you that the Word of God is something more. It has a power that ordinary human speech does not possess. The Word of God is speech to *operate*. It does not merely inform. It does not merely persuade you to change the way you live or think. *It changes you*. The Word of God is powerful. It does things. It changes hearts and minds. It more than informs. It more than persuades. It operates. The Holy Spirit is your surgeon, and the Word of God is his scalpel. *The Letter to the Hebrews* tells us, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). When you open the pages of Scripture, and when you walk through the doors of this sanctuary. Do not expect to be merely informed. Do not expect to be merely persuaded. Expect to be changed. Expect to be operated on, not by me or whatever other pastor might stand in a pulpit, but by the Holy Spirit.

The Word of God is powerful. This is one of the themes of this text, and it will continue to resound throughout the rest of 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy, as best as we can tell, is the last of Paul’s letters, or at least the last one we have a copy of. Paul is in prison, and he knows that he will soon be executed. So these are kind of like his last words.

He writes to his young friend and fellow pastor, Timothy. Paul initially found Timothy on one of his missionary journeys. Timothy was already a Christian, and he was well spoken of in

the Church, so Paul invited Timothy to join him in his mission work. Paul became a mentor to Timothy, and the two formed a close relationship. They were close enough that Paul addresses him as “My beloved child” (1:2).

Now, Paul clearly had a great influence on Timothy, but Timothy did not first learn the faith from Paul. Timothy was already a Christian, and he was already well thought of by the Church before Paul even met him. And we learn in this letter what influenced Timothy’s faith. Paul writes, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” (1:5). Timothy benefited from a legacy of faith.

Parents, by far, have the greatest influence on their children growing up to be faithful Christians. Children tend to follow the example of their parents, even into adulthood. And so it is the responsibility of every Christian parent to teach their children the faith. Your faith is the greatest legacy you can give them.

But we often hear parents say, “I don’t want to force Christianity on my kids. I want them to make their own choices.” This makes me sad. Parents force good things on their kids all the time. That’s a big part of being a parent. You force vegetables, bedtime, clothes, baths, school, and all sorts of good things on your children. If you don’t force good things on your children, the state will charge you with neglect and take them away. If something is good and true and necessary, parents are responsible to give it to their kids.

And so parents pass down their values and beliefs to their children too. We often do this without even thinking about it. Whatever your kids see that you value, they will believe those things are valuable. So if you insist on them doing certain other things, but you don’t insist on them going to church, they will learn that Christianity just isn’t that important.

Or if you insist that they go through certain things in the church, like Sunday school and confirmation, but you don’t value the Church in your own life, you will teach them by your example that the Christian faith is really just for kids.

Parents teach their children the faith in two basic ways: One, by going to church with them, and second, by teaching the faith at home. And this doesn’t have to be complicated. Read the Bible together at home. Pray together. If your kids are small, read a children’s Bible before bed. And teach them the catechism. Just help them memorize it. You don’t have to be able to lecture on it. All you have to be able to do is read. The catechism was designed to be used in the home, not just the Church.

If you want to outsource your children’s Christian education to the Church, we will teach them the Christian faith, but they will learn from you that it doesn’t matter. More often than not, those children do not remain in the Church when they become adults. And the reason is simple: their parents didn’t.

Think about what is really important to pass down to them. Sometimes the things we pass down to our kids are rather trivial. Parents might let children do whatever they want on Sunday morning, but on Sunday afternoon they’d better be cheering for the Vikings.

Or how often do you see three generations driving the same brand of truck? We have Chevy families and we have Ford families. You know what I mean? That’s a value we actually pass onto our kids. I’m one of those who will never buy a Ford, no matter how many Chevys rust out on me. And it’s not because there’s anything wrong with Fords. The only reason is because my dad has always driven a Chevy. That’s the only reason.

And I know that's kind of funny, but I hope you see my point: whatever you value, your children are going to value the same thing. Even if you don't intend for them to imitate you, they probably will.

Now this isn't a fixed rule. Of course, children will still make their own choices. You might have the best parents in the world, and a kid might take the wrong path. Or you might have the worst parents in the world, but God finds a way to lead a child in the right path. At some point, it's out of your hands. My point is simply that parents are God's best instrument in leading children on the right path.

So what do you want to pass on to your children? And this isn't just for parents. Obviously, parents have the biggest influence. But this is also for grandparents, aunts, uncles, and every adult in a child's life. I know for a fact that every single member of this congregation has children in their life, because there are children in this church. Even if there are no children in your family, there are children in your church, and it is the responsibility of all of us to pray for them, give them a godly example, and, whenever we have opportunity, teach them the faith. When they look up to you, they see what you value. That's how they learn what is valuable and what is not. So what do we want to hand down to them? And how do we want them to think of the Christian faith?

The real issue is this: *Did Jesus rise from the dead?* The truth and value of the Christian faith hinges on that question. If the answer is "no," then go ahead and let them search the world over for truth. But if the answer is "yes" (and we have ample historical reasons to say it is) then there is no greater gift we can pass on to the children in our lives.

If you've taken this sermon to heart, this probably seems like a heavy burden. And it is! We should all take this seriously. But we should also rest in the promise that the success of God's Word depends on someone else. Faith is the work of the Holy Spirit as he attends to the Word of God. He creates and strengthens faith through his Word.

A seminary professor taught us something regarding preaching, but it also relates to teaching the faith at home, so I'm going to translate it into that context: *Teach the faith as if everything depends on you, and as if nothing depends on you.* Everything I said a moment ago about teaching your children the faith is true, but the success of it really depends on the Holy Spirit and his powerful Word.

So devote yourself to the task completely. Do everything you can. And when you are done, don't worry about whether you were good enough, because you probably weren't! Our teaching can never be good enough. But the Holy Spirit attends to the Word of God. That is where the power comes from. Through the Law he convicts us of our sins. And through the Gospel he creates faith in Jesus Christ, assuring us that our sins are truly forgiven on account of Jesus' death and resurrection.

In this letter, Paul shows tremendous confidence in the power of the Word of God. Remember, the Word of God is speech to operate. Paul has such confidence in the Word of God that he is willing to suffer imprisonment and even death for the testimony of his Lord (1:8). Even as he sits in chains, he is not ashamed. From all outward appearances, he has failed. He has been silenced, but the Word of God is not silenced. One of the great gems of this letter comes in the next chapter, where he says, "But the Word of God is not bound!" (2:9). Chains can hold Paul in a prison cell. A sword will soon separate his lungs from his mouth, and his words will cease. But the Word of God will continue, and the Holy Spirit will continue to attend to that Word.

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So Paul's is not concerned about his own circumstances, because he has learned to find his joy in something else. He finds his joy in the Word of God. Even as he faces his death, he has joy, because the thing he really cares about is not going to fail. And he knows that the success of God's Word does not depend on him. He can be taken from this earth, but the Word will continue.

And so he speaks of the deposit God had entrusted to him. The deposit, by the way, is the Gospel. God had entrusted Paul with the ministry of the Gospel, but Paul knows the Holy Spirit is really the one who guards it. So he says, "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me" (1:12). God had entrusted the ministry of the Gospel to Paul, but God is really the one who guards it. Paul spent his entire life as a Christian working as if everything depended on his work, but at the end he confesses that none of it really depends on him. It depends on the Holy Spirit, who faithfully attends to his Word.

This is why we have such a treasure in the Word of God. This is why we seek it for our own good and for the good of our children. Through this gospel, Jesus "abolished death and brought life and immortality to life" (1:10). The salvation he earned for you by his death and resurrection is delivered to you here in his Word. So hold this Word dear to your heart. Guard it with everything you have. Rejoice in this Word, for it cannot fail, and you will not be put to shame. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.