

FAITHFULNESS

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

October 9, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The epistle lesson comes from *Paul's Second Letter to Timothy*, chapter 2, verses 1 through 13. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From 2 Timothy 2, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. ³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. ⁵ An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. ⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

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.

Jesus is faithful. Even when we are faithless, he remains faithful. It's just who he is. When we are weak, when we have doubts, when we are sinful, and when we are unfaithful to him, he remains faithful. It's who he is. It is his nature to be faithful. He has promised to forgive us. He has promised to love us. He has promised to protect us. And he keeps his promises. Even when we are faithless, he keeps his promises, because his promises do not depend on us. His promises depend on his gracious and faithful character. If he were to break his promises, he would deny his own nature. It is simply not in his nature to break promises. It is not in his nature to be unfaithful. To do so would be to deny himself, and he cannot do that. Therefore, when we are faithless, he remains faithful.

Christians often feel like we don't have enough faith. We have doubts. These doubts are not good, but it is normal for Christians to have doubts. We might doubt that Jesus is really the Son of God, that he was born of a virgin, or that he really rose from the dead. We might doubt that

FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy 2:1-13)

God created the world in six days or that he sent a flood to cover the entire earth. We might doubt other historical events recorded in the Bible. None of this is good, but it is normal to have doubts.

And it's kind of strange sometimes. We might know these things. We might know the evidence for them. We might know that it is completely reasonable to believe these things. And yet, we might still have doubts. We might wonder, *What if? What if I have believed in vain?*

Or our doubts might be more personal. We might look at our doubts and wonder if we have enough faith. We might wonder if God can still love us in spite of our doubts. Or we might wonder if God can keep forgiving our sins over, and over, and over again. When you go to confession, you might confess the same sins over and over again, because you keep committing those same sins. And when we get to the point where we get tired and bored of confessing the same sins over and over again, we might start to wonder if God is getting tired of it too. At what point does he draw a limit on forgiveness? Am I close to that limit? Have I already crossed it?

Even if we know our doubts are false, we still wrestle with them. And we might fear that the existence of doubt means we don't really have faith. It's kind of funny. Our doubts make us doubt whether or not we are truly saved. It seems to be a common experience among Christians that we don't believe as strongly as we want to believe. We often feel faithless.

So we say things like, "I must not have enough faith." And you're right. You don't. There are even some false teachers who say, "If you don't get what you pray for, it's because you don't have enough faith." This is a false and destructive teaching. Because it's not the amount of faith you have that matters. It's who you trust in that matters.

The keyword in this passage is "faithful." Jesus is faithful, and he desires for us to be faithful as well.

Paul is writing to his young protégé, Timothy. Paul instructs Timothy to continue teaching what Paul had taught him, and to also entrust that teaching to other faithful men, who will be able to teach also (2:2). So the first use of the word "faithful" has to do with Christian teachers. It is God's will that pastors and teachers would faithfully teach the Word of God.

Timothy did this by following the teaching that Paul had entrusted to him. Today, Christian pastors and teachers do this by following the teaching of the Scriptures. There we have the words of Paul, as well as the other apostles in the New Testament, and the prophets in the Old Testament. Any Christian pastor or teacher must be faithful to the Holy Scriptures.

There are many different things you might look for in a pastor. And I bring this up so that, one, you might hold me accountable to what I am supposed to be and do, and, two, because I will probably not be the pastor here until the return of Christ. At some point, I don't know when, you will look for another pastor.

There are many things we might be tempted to look for in a pastor. You might want an engaging speaker. You might want him to be intelligent, humorous, or a good storyteller. Maybe you want someone with an outgoing personality or a cool edge so he can relate to the youth. You might want him to be very political or never political. And that probably goes back and forth depending on whether or not he fits your politics. You might want a good administrator or team builder who can grow the church. Some of these things are good. Some might not be so good. But there is one attribute you should look for above all else: faithfulness. Is he faithful to the Word of God? And is he faithful to God's call? That is, does he teach the Scriptures accurately and clearly? And does he do the things he is called to do? Besides teaching, does he also visit the

FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy 2:1-13)

sick and distressed? When you are wandering into sin, does he call you to repentance? A pastor might be many things, but the one thing you must demand is faithfulness.

It feels a little bit weird for me, your pastor, to be teaching you about the pastoral office. But this is part of the Word of God, and you need to know how to spot a faithful pastor. If you get a pastor who has many great abilities, but he's not faithful to the Word of God, his great abilities will not help you at all, but rather harm you. He might preach interesting and engaging sermons to a large congregation, and everyone would feel good about it, but if his teaching is not faithful to the Word of God, he will help no one, but harm them instead. So this is the one thing you should require above all else: faithfulness.

With this in mind, Paul goes on to remind Timothy of the core of his teaching: Jesus Christ. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel" (2:8). If a pastor is faithful, he will teach you about Jesus.

For Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ was worth more than anything. He was suffering for this good news, "Bound with chains as a criminal," he said (2:9).

Here we get a glimpse into Paul's spirit. Paul had learned to set his hope on something outside of himself. And this isn't something that we can just do to our own hearts, but this is a gift from the Holy Spirit. And so we should pray that the Holy Spirit would give this same gift to us. Paul cared more about the spread of the Gospel than he did about his own life. He was bound in chains. But that was fine. The thing he really cared about was not bound with chains. So he expresses his great joy by saying, "But the word of God is not bound!" (2:9). The authorities could bind Paul, but they could not bind the Word of God. It kept spreading, and that was Paul's great joy. The secret to a joyful life is to care about something else more than yourself. And if that something else cannot fail, then you will never be disappointed. And the only things that cannot fail are God and his gifts. Paul found his joy in Jesus Christ. And the one thing Paul cared about more than anything else in this world is the Word of God. He cared about the success of the Word of God more than he cared about his own wellbeing. So when his wellbeing was attacked and threatened, his joy was undiminished, because he cared more about the Word of God, and the Word of God does not fail.

As he sat in his prison cell, he heard reports of the Gospel of Jesus Christ being preached all over the world. People were hearing the good news. They were repenting of their sins. They were being forgiven of their sins. They were trusting in Jesus Christ. They were receiving eternal salvation. Paul's heart had come to desire the same thing God desires. So instead of being disappointed by his own misfortune, he found joy in God's success.

This is not something we can make our hearts do. Our sinful natures are curved in on ourselves. So we should pray that God would take our concern off of ourselves, so that we will desire the same things he desires. And when he succeeds, we will share in his joy.

God desires to share all of his joy with us. We see this in the little hymn Paul includes. We don't know if Paul was quoting this hymn, or if he wrote it himself, but it's beautiful. It says, "If we have died with him, we will also live with him" (2:11).

This reminds us of our Baptisms. Baptism is dying with Christ and rising with him. This is one of the things Paul often emphasizes about Baptism. In Romans 6 he says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with

FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy 2:1-13)

him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:4-5).

Baptism is all about Jesus sharing his death and resurrection with us. His death was the payment for all of our sin. He shares that death with us, so that, through Baptism, we might die with him. It’s a non-fatal death. The death sentence we all deserve is carried out through Baptism. We share in the death he died for us. And if we share in that death, we will also share in his resurrection. “If we have died with him, we will also live with him.”

The next line: “If we endure, we will also reign with him” (2:12). This is the reward for all who endure suffering for Jesus’ sake. If we do not give up the faith in the midst of persecution or suffering, a crown of life awaits us. When Jesus promises us eternal life, he doesn’t mean that we will be servants or peasants in his kingdom. Nor does he promise us middle management. He promises that we will reign with him. We come into God’s kingdom, not as servants, but as children. And if we are his children, then we are heirs of his kingdom. You don’t get a part of the kingdom. You get the whole thing. “If we endure, we will also reign with him.”

But there is also a warning: “If we deny him, he also will deny us” (2:12). If you decide that you love this world more, or you love yourself more, so that you deny Jesus and chase after something else, he will also deny you. On the Judgment Day, he will say, “**I never knew you; depart from me**” (7:23). If you want to go your own way, you can. A lot of people do. And the end of that road is destruction.

And this warning might make us fear. You might think, *What if that’s me? I don’t want it to be me, but sometimes I just feel so weak.*

There is a difference between denial and faithlessness. “If we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2:12-13). You don’t have enough faith. No doubt about it. If it depends on how much faith you have, you don’t have enough.

In the gospel lesson last week, we heard Jesus say, “**If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you**” (Luke 17:6). Some might take this to mean that if you have just a little bit of faith, you can do great things. And that’s true, but it’s not really the point. Two thousand years later, I have still not heard of a single person who has moved a tree into the sea just by talking to it. And all you need to do that, Jesus says, is faith like a mustard seed, which, by the way, is really, really small. How much more faith would you need to move yourself from this world to heaven. If it’s your faith that you trust in, you certainly do not have enough. Furthermore, if you trust in your faith, you’re not actually trusting in Jesus, and that’s not faith at all.

But if it’s Jesus that you trust in, then the size of your faith is irrelevant. True faith does not depend on itself. True faith does not depend on its own size. True faith depends only on Jesus. That means that you can be saved in spite of your doubts and in spite of your faithlessness.

The only thing that matters then is Jesus’ faithfulness. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful.” We certainly do not deserve his faithfulness, but he remains faithful because it is his nature. He has promised to seek you when you stray. He has promised to bring you back. He has promised to forgive you over, and over, and over again. He has promised to love you. And he cannot break his promises. It is his nature to be faithful. To do otherwise would be to deny himself, and he cannot do that.

If there is one thing God cannot do, it’s this: he cannot contradict his own nature. He cannot be the opposite of how he is. If it is his nature to be faithful, then he cannot be unfaithful. It is his

FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy 2:1-13)

nature to keep his promises. Therefore, he cannot break his promises. “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.” Amen.

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