

I Know Whom I Have Believed

II Timothy 1:1-14

Wayne Eberly

October 2, 2016

Our passage this morning has Paul telling us he was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel. Gospel is good news, specifically the good news about Jesus Christ. How did Paul do in terms of sharing the good news? Within his lifetime the Lord used him to found churches in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, Macedonia, and Greece. In the 2,000 years since Paul was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel, the Christian faith has spread. On this World Communion Sunday, let us pause for a moment to give thanks that the Bible has been translated into at least 554 languages, and that portions of the Bible have been translated into 2,932 languages. Of all the people on this planet 2.4 billion are Christians. Christianity is the predominant religion in Europe, Russia, the Americas, the Philippines, South Africa, Central Africa, and East Africa. There is the potential that sometime today billions of people in countries around this whole world in hundreds if not thousands of languages will remember the words of Jesus when he took the bread and the cup, saying, “This is my body broken for you...this is my blood shed for you.”

When we consider that the gospel truly is good news, it seems to make perfect sense that so many people in so many places in so many languages have heard and believed in the name of Jesus Christ. Within just the first few verses of this second letter Paul wrote to Timothy, the gospel light shines bright in all of its goodness. The opening greeting includes the words grace, mercy and peace. Each one of these words is filled with blessing.

Grace refers to the free gift that we have been given in Jesus Christ. “By grace we have been saved, through faith—and this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9) What we have received from Christ Jesus is a gift that we did not earn and a gift that we did not deserve. It is a gift that has been freely given.

Mercy describes God’s choice to overlook our sin and brokenness. Instead of judgment and wrath his mercy led God to shower us with love. In essence, his mercy proves his love. “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)

Peace is the result of this gracious and merciful gift that we did not earn, but simply claimed by believing in Jesus Christ, by having faith in Jesus Christ. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)

Paul’s words to Timothy highlight a special gift that Timothy had. He had a believing grandmother and a believing mother. His grandmother was Lois and his mother was Eunice. The faith they had in Jesus Christ has been passed down to Timothy. A friend of mine died not long after he turned 90. Upon his death I read some of his papers he had written. In one of his writings he told how he learned to pray. He was a young boy of four or five and he was staying with his grandmother. Every morning he would walk by her room and look in. She would be on her knees praying. I met him when he was 70, so that memory was from long ago, and yet the first time we prayed together he said, “Let’s get on our knees. That’s how my grandmother taught me to pray.” Before he died my friend saw his own son become ordained as an elder in the Presbyterian Church. It is a beautiful thing, and it is a precious gift when someone like Timothy receives a faith that lived in his grandmother Lois and in his mother Eunice and now in Timothy.

But the good news of the gospel is not limited to those who received the faith through family members. The gospel is not simply for those who are related by blood. Paul has called Timothy my dear son in the faith. There is one problem with this greeting. Timothy is not Paul’s dear son. In Acts 16 we are introduced to Timothy. We read, “Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek.” (Acts 16:1) Paul came to Lystra where Timothy lived. Timothy had a mother and a father. And Paul was not his father. Someone else was. And yet because of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the experience of God’s grace, mercy and peace, two men, two believers, who were not even remotely related, found their lives so intimately connected and the bond of faith they shared so deep and lasting that they became father and son in their Christian faith. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that those who believe in him become part of a family that is knit together in such a bond of love that we are like a body whose ligaments and joints and tendons are all wrapped up together. And if you are part of the Body, the Body of Christ, you belong. You have brothers and sisters, and a man named Paul who didn’t share an ounce of blood relation with a younger man named Timothy writes of him that he is his dear son in the faith. On this World Communion Sunday, if we were to sit at table with any of the believers from any of the Christian churches near or far, we would sit at the table as brothers and sisters.

This guy named Paul, he knew all about the good news of Jesus Christ, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had been called and appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel. There is no doubt Paul believed that one day every knee would bow on heaven and on earth and confess with their tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord. In his instructions to Timothy about prayer in his first letter he reminded Timothy that God wants all people to be saved and that Jesus Christ gave his life as a ransom for all people. What is curious to me is how Paul doesn't elaborate on the good news of the gospel. Yes we hear about grace, mercy, and peace. Yes we hear about the amazing ability of the gospel to create family bonds through a shared faith. But when we are talking good news, isn't there so much more Paul could have highlighted?

If you want to be a herald of the gospel, to tell the world, don't be shy Paul. Tell the people about the promise of good news for the poor and recovery of sight for the blind. Tell about the oppressed being delivered from bondage. Tell about the lame who walk and the deaf who hear. Tell about the demons that get cast out and the tortured souls who get set free. Tell the whole gospel Paul. This Jesus turns water to wine...he feeds 5,000 with leftovers to spare...he walks on the water...he calms the storms. He makes the lepers clean and the sinners find forgiveness. He says that old enemy of humanity and that old enemy of God, that enemy called Satan is going to fall like lightning from heaven. I'm talking victory here, victory I tell you. I'm talking power and glory and might. You start talking about these types of miracles and blessings, you might not have just 2.4 billion, you might have people lining up to claim their share of the inheritance. Paul, if you are a herald and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel, tell the world the whole gospel.

Tell the whole gospel? Do we really think Paul needs us to remind him to tell the whole gospel? Paul knew the whole gospel and he spent his days telling the whole gospel. In fact, in this small section of the second letter he wrote to his young protégé Timothy, Paul is telling Timothy to do that very thing. He is telling Timothy to tell the whole gospel. It seems Timothy is facing challenges and struggles and opposition because people don't always want the whole gospel. You see the whole gospel is not just the power and glory and might of Jesus Christ. The whole gospel is not just the blessings and joys of Jesus Christ. The whole gospel is not just the victory. The whole gospel is told when we proclaim the whole story of Jesus Christ. He who was all powerful and all mighty and filled with glory; he who was the Son of God; this Word of God who was with God in the beginning and who was God, became flesh and dwelt among us; this Jesus the Christ suffered and died. And apparently many people who lined up to worship the God who walks on water and feeds the multitude and heals the sick and cures the lame, they would cut and run when they heard the part of the gospel about Jesus suffering and dying. A God who suffers and dies is shameful. That is not the God we are going to embrace. We want blessing. We want glory. We want victory.

Facing the challenge of sharing the whole gospel, the gospel that includes at its very heart the Savior who suffers, Paul writes to Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.” This is not a new theme for Paul. He wrote to the church in Corinth that he understood the message of the cross is foolishness to many. He understood it was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. So what did he do with a message that was stumbling block and foolishness? “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Did Paul hide the message of the cross in footnotes, did he bury the story on page 25 of the newspaper, did he cover his mouth and turn away as he whispered a message he hoped no one would hear? No. Paul is the apostle who said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, and the gospel of which he was not ashamed was the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified.

That the Son of God suffered is nothing to be ashamed of. The suffering of Jesus demonstrates his deep commitment to humanity. Because he suffered our wounds are healed. Because he suffered we can come to him in our deepest moments of suffering, of sadness, of rejection, of failure, of opposition and persecution, of darkness and of despair. Because he suffered we find God is with us in our suffering. Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and he also tells Timothy of the suffering Paul is going through. Paul was imprisoned, Paul suffered, Paul was rejected, Paul was beaten, Paul knew hardship and struggle. The good news is that Paul was absolutely convinced that God was with him every step of the way. That is what leads to this incredible statement of faith Paul makes at the end of our passage this morning. He refers to his suffering, but instead of complaining and lamenting about his suffering, he believes his suffering has a purpose. He says that he is not ashamed of his suffering. His suffering has strengthened his faith. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto him against that day.”

I went to a pastor’s conference once, and as is often the case I was looking for some good news. I wanted some stories of victory. I wanted to hear tales of success. I was looking for something to shout about, to celebrate, to propagate, and probably imitate. I wanted a story of glory. So I went to hear one well-known preacher had to say. I wanted a story of glory. What I got was the gospel. The whole gospel. This preacher was pastor of a large church, he had many titles and honors, his church had been featured in the newspaper and had many successes. But when he stood up he didn’t talk about any of that. Instead he told about the night there was a knock on the door. He opened the door to find a police chaplain standing there, who told him his 22 year old son had been killed in a car wreck. In that moment he needed a God who had suffered, who had experienced pain and loss and rejection. At that moment he needed the whole gospel. I will always remember his words.

“Dear friends, I have been to the bottom! I have been to where few of you ever have been or ever will be. I have been to where life hurts the most and cuts the deepest and hits the hardest. Therefore, listen to me when I tell you that faith in Jesus Christ is not some sideline pursuit, some pleasant diversion, some enjoyable hobby in your life. It’s not something you give yourself to when it’s convenient or when it helps you along your career track or when you want to appear respectable. It’s not just a part of your life. You’ve got to see it as the center of your life, the foundation of your whole existence. Nothing else in your life really matters, nothing else in your life will last. When the police chaplain says, “Your son did not survive,” I can tell you that you find out right then that the only thing you have left is faith. But because of my faith, I can say to you, “I feel the bottom, and it is sound.”¹

Maybe that is why Paul tells Timothy to never be ashamed of the suffering Christ endured, or the death Jesus died on the cross. Maybe that is why Paul told Timothy never to be ashamed of the suffering and pain Paul endured. Instead of these being shameful things that show a God who is weak and ineffective, these things show a God who endured weakness and sorrow and heartbreak and pain, so that we would know that there is nothing in all creation that will ever separate us from the love of God. Maybe that is what Paul tells Timothy. When you feel the bottom, when you are at the bottom, when everything else gives way, the bottom is sound. Because Jesus has been there. And he will always be there. Maybe that is what Paul wants Timothy, and all of us to know, when he makes that powerful declaration of faith. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able, to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Today there might well be billions of people in hundreds if not thousands of languages celebrating the Lord’s Supper on this World Communion Day. They are celebrating, and we are celebrating, because we know the whole gospel. We are celebrating because we know the whole gospel that tells us Jesus took bread and said, “This is my body broken for you.” And we know the whole gospel that tells us Jesus took the cup and said, “This is my blood shed for you.” Friends, let us never be ashamed of the suffering our Lord endured. It was for our sake. Because of his wounds we find healing, and hope, and strength, and courage, to follow him faithfully every day of our lives. When it comes time to confess your faith, may your heart be filled with courage and confidence as you say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able, to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

¹ Howard Edington, Downtown Church: The Heart of the City, p. 149.