PENTECOST 21
October 9, 2016
10:15 a.m.
Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Be Strong In the Grace of Christ Jesus!

Sermon Text: 2 Timothy 2:1-13 (NIV)

2 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 3 Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. 7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect [so] that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

11 Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
12 if we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
13 if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.
Have you shopped at Walgreens in the past few months? If so, you haven’t heard the cashier send you on your way by smiling and merrily wishing you, “Be well!” That’s because corporate decided that its “be well” campaign had “accomplished its goal of reinforcing our branding” according to their spokesman Michael Polzin. It was a curious goodbye anyway. “Be well”? If it was in the power of Walgreens’ customers to fulfill that command they probably wouldn’t be visiting a pharmacy in the first place. Granted, people shop at Walgreens for other items while picking up their prescriptions, but no matter what brings them into the store it is not within their power to make themselves well.

It may seem like a curiously similar mandate with which the Apostle Paul charges his young protégé, Pastor Timothy, “You then, my son, be strong.” Yet Paul doesn’t leave off there, in the manner of a Walgreens’ checker in days gone by. He can’t, because he knows by experience that Timothy doesn’t have the power to strengthen himself no matter how much he might want to. Timothy’s strength must be found outside of himself—“in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” The same is true for you and me. We have no inherent power to steel ourselves against temptation or to put our trust in God. The power, that strength, must come from outside of us as well. So, on this October morning, this is God’s word for us too:

**BE STRONG IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST JESUS!**

To belabor the Walgreens’ analogy a bit longer, it must be emphasized that though Jesus is indeed “the Great Physician,” He isn’t the great pharmacist. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write to Timothy, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” The grace of God isn’t a medicine He simply dispenses. It’s not, as some teach, a healing substance imparted to you or infused into you like an IV drip. No, it remains in Christ Jesus. If you’ll pardon some pretentious Latin, the grace of God is—as the reformers understood and insisted upon—the *favor Dei propter Christum*: the favor of God on account of, or because of, Christ. In other words, it’s not a “thing” in you; it’s the gracious attitude or disposition of God Himself toward you. On account of Christ, who obeyed God’s Law perfectly in our stead and who suffered its harshest penalty of eternal damnation in hell for us while on the cross, God is now favorably disposed toward you and me. To believe this—to know that this is most certainly true—is to be strengthened by God’s Spirit.

Timothy needed the Spirit’s power to persevere in his calling as a minister of God who’d been put in charge of overseeing the congregation in the city of Ephesus. His mentor Paul was “suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal” in a prison cell in Rome awaiting trial before the Emperor Nero. He would die a martyr’s death at the hands of that
infamous persecutor of the nascent Church. Paul doesn’t take his situation lightly. But he also knows He’s heaven-bound!

And he knew that Timothy, his spiritual son whom he ordained into full-time gospel ministry, could not help but share in his suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

So Paul encourages him, “Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Just as his spiritual father, Paul, was enduring hardship for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of the gospel, so Timothy could expect to undergo similar persecution. Like Paul, he too was a faithful messenger of God’s grace to the lost and broken souls he pastored in Ephesus and throughout the Roman province of Asia Minor. So, Timothy, too could expect the same sort of persecution he was enduring because of his high calling as a child of God and heir of salvation. Paul couldn’t sugarcoat it for Timothy. And he wouldn’t sugarcoat it for us were he preaching to us this morning either. Timothy needed strengthening. And so do we, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Not necessarily because our faith in Jesus will result in imprisonment—although it might come to that. Not because sharing the Good News with our neighbor or co-worker will result in our death. But I can’t sugarcoat it any more than St. Paul does—or Jesus Himself does. “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” the Savior warned in Matthew 10:22.

So we need the strength to persevere in faith and to produce the “good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10) just like Timothy did. We’re no different than he was. We are equally sinful by nature, and we’re also equally redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Paul wrote, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; and [all] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23). We need God’s power to face the persecution, ridicule and rejection that comes from unbelievers, whether it’s directed at us personally or comes by way of a changing culture that maligns our faith and the values we stand for. Without God’s power, we might try to avoid suffering for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of His truth. We might even be tempted to abandon our faith altogether. Paul wasn’t in chains because of what he believed. He was in chains for what he preached. The world won’t hate you, persecute you or slight you for what you believe as long as you keep it to yourself.

But that’s not an option—at least not one that’s pleasing to God. It wasn’t for Paul, it wasn’t for Timothy and it’s not for you or for me. Jesus asks, “Who lights a lamp and puts it under a basket?” “Instead,” He says, “they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds” and be led by our example to “glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:15-17). The prophet Daniel was given a vision of the end times in which we live. And he stated, “Those who are
Paul touches on the same heavenly hope in his words to Timothy in today's sermon text. He writes, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect [so] that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory” (vv. 8-10).

“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (vv. 1-2). God strengthens us to endure so that we might speak this same saving Word to our neighbors. But it remains God’s Word. He Himself acts in it and with it by His Holy Spirit. And He remains faithful to it for time and for eternity. Paul quotes what was likely a well-known hymn to Timothy to encourage him to hold fast to the truth and impart it to others so that they, in turn, would do so just as faithfully to the next generation. “Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (vv. 11-13).

Let these eternal truths be the source of your strength, your comfort and your confidence! Even in the face of hatred, suffering or the threat of death your salvation has been assured! “Remember Jesus Christ” Paul proclaims, “raised from the dead” (v. 8). Remember Him who for you sake has already defeated death. Remember the “trustworthy saying” Paul declares to Timothy: “If we died with him, we will also live with him” (v. 11). And remember that you already died with Jesus in your baptism. There you were buried with Him and raised again with Him (Rom. 6:3-5). There His unbound Word together with the water unbound you from the shackles of sin, death and the devil. There His promise was spoken to you and for you as He adopted you into His family, and to that promise “he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” So be strengthened and encouraged in the sure and certain comfort of this promise of “the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Amen!