

Lay Preachers' Bulletin – October 2019

October's lectionary notes have been provided by The Rev Dr. Carmen Maier.

October 6 – Pentecost 17

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Summary:

Paul begins his second letter to Timothy by expressing his deep affection for him. Next, he reminds Timothy who “Timothy” is – namely, someone who has been brought up in the faith. He has also been set apart for the work of the ministry through the laying on of Paul’s hands. On this basis, Paul is urging him to not be ashamed of Christ. “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

Paul reminds Timothy of the central truth of the gospel they preach: they are what they are by grace. He ends with stating his confidence that God will guard everything Paul offered to God even in all his suffering. Timothy should have the same confidence.

Application:

All of us are set apart for the work of the ministry in some ways. In Paul’s other writings (e.g., 1 and 2 Cor.) he makes this clear. In these letters to Timothy, he is specifically addressing a leader of the church. That does not mean, however, everybody else gets to toss these letters! Many of us will be able to identify with Timothy, who needed to be encouraged not to be timid. All of us can benefit from having someone older in the faith remind us of who we are. Whether or not we come from a Christian background, we all have a story of how we got to where we are today. And this is a work of grace! Even if it has involved suffering. We, like Timothy, can take heart that in God, all that we are and all that we have offered in his name is safe.

October 13 – Pentecost 18

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Summary:

Paul reflects on the power of the gospel from the standpoint of being in chains as a prisoner. He expresses tremendous confidence in the power of God's word. His deep love for God's people motivates him. In everything that hinders him, he knows the gospel is not chained. This is because of God's very nature, which is faithful. God's word is faithful because God is faithful.

Those who are faithful to God's word are promised life, one which stretches to all eternity where they will join God in reigning over creation. In light of this reality, wrangling over words is a useless waste of time. Timothy is encouraged to be faithful to the "Word" and to keep others from wrangling over "words." This entails study, so that he can accurately present the truth of the gospel.

Application:

Paul has a very high theology of scripture. Scripture is more powerful than any suffering he endures in this life. Are we also as confident that the promises of scripture are so true that we are able to endure suffering for the sake of others, with whom we want to share God's truth? Are we so committed to knowing our faith that we will take some time to study, so that we can actually tell the difference between what is "wrangling," and what is truth?

Take some time to pray for those who will hear God's word this Sunday and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a loving angle from which to share the challenge to invest life and energy in knowing the gospel for the sake of others.

October 20 – Pentecost 19

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Summary:

Paul, as in the reading for Oct. 6, again encourages Timothy by reminding him of who he is – namely, one who has been raised to know the scriptures. Next, he lauds the faithfulness of the scriptures, so that Timothy should have every confidence in presenting them: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The inspired scriptures are the living word of God that equips Christians “for every good work.”

Paul is emphatic as he gives Timothy the somber task of representing these scriptures, in good times, and bad. Timothy is to be patient. He is also to be prepared that times are close at hand when people will hear only what they want to hear and will wander to others who will present just that. This is not to deter him from being true to the message of the gospel, or from being true to his calling.

Application:

This passage should challenge us all to revisit what we believe about the scriptures. Are they only literature? Are they documents from the past about people removed from us? Or are they “inspired”? Are they really the “word of God” and so timeless and very much alive, God-breathed afresh every time they are read? How much confidence do we have in God’s word? Are we willing to take up a charge to represent them, no matter what? Why is this gospel so compelling to Paul, why is the mission so urgent, why can Timothy continue faithfully, following in Paul’s footsteps? Paul says the scriptures have instructed Timothy “for salvation through faith in Christ.” This is a very particular gospel, one centered on a person, Jesus Christ. Paul makes his charge to Timothy “in view of [Christ’s] appearing and his kingdom.” Are we convinced of the creed that Christ will come again? Do we really believe in God’s kingdom when we pray the Lord’s prayer?

Sometimes we struggle with our faith, and that is okay. It is a healthy process of growth. Sometimes it is helpful to go to those who have gone before in the faith and allow their faith to inform ours. If you are inclined to do so, an early Christian text that has been particularly encouraging to me with regard to the inspired nature of the biblical text is Origen, *On First Principles*, Book Four (You may find this online at CCEL = Christian Classics Ethereal Library).

Take some time to pray for those who will gather to hear God's word. Ask God to present you with a way to encourage listeners to wrestle with the "inspired" nature of God's word.

October 27 – Pentecost 20

2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18

Summary:

Paul is at the conclusion of his ministry and makes an encouraging presentation of his life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." On this basis he can look forward to what awaits him without fear: "From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness." We need to remember here that Paul throughout his writings emphasizes grace, which enables the work of God. What he is expressing here is not self-righteousness, but satisfaction in completion of the life-task God has given him. He also does not shrink from acknowledging the many and fierce difficulties he encountered as brought the gospel to the Gentiles. At the end, God's faithfulness is acknowledged above all else.

Application:

Paul's life journey is amazing. It entails incredible dedication and struggle to make the gospel known beyond his own Jewish tradition and into the Gentile world beyond Jerusalem. His journey can be intimidating to those who consider themselves "simple Christians." How can his life possibly relate to

ours? More than comparing lives, we might be better off looking at his faith in awe and allowing it to encourage us. If Paul had faith for all the big things he did for God's Kingdom, can we have faith for the little things we are called to do today? Paul's call is not our call, just as your friend's call is not your call. Everyone has a unique grace from God to fulfill their calling. What a beautiful thing it is to listen to the testimony of someone who has finished their vocation in good faith. Can we be inspired to do the best with the rest of our lives to be faithful to what God is calling us to do?