

Todd R. Allen  
2017  
Interim Pastor  
Easter

May 7,  
Fourth Sunday of

“Beginnings...and Endings”  
“*The Story*”: Chapter 30

Scripture: Acts, Chapters 13-20  
Pauline Epistles

Reading One:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ!

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. All of us lived at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh<sup>[a]</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. We were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Reading Two:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To Timothy, my dear son:

<sup>3</sup> I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. <sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. <sup>8</sup> So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner.

### Reading Three:

My son, be strong, then, in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust them to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. <sup>3</sup> Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,<sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God<sup>[a]</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.

<sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight,  
I have finished the race,  
I have kept the faith.

<sup>8</sup> Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Opening Prayer: Grant, Lord God that your Word to us, this day, will come alive through the touch of the Holy Spirit upon my lips and upon our thoughts—through Christ Our Risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

It is hard, this day, to hear the words I've read without emotion. Paul—the great apostle—is saying goodbye. His end is near—and he knows it. He has been under arrest in Rome, we will remember, for the better part of two years, his fate the topic of heated discussions—for Paul has—as he himself says—fought a fight. He has made a

mark for himself—and he has become—as it were—also a marked man. Here is what has happened, and Paul knows, at this time, that his time is limited....

And, yet, we also know that Paul pens perhaps his most joy-filled letter—the Letter to the Church in Ephesus—during this same captivity. How hard it must have been, we might think, for Paul to have put on joyfulness, given his situation—that is, until we read these words:

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ!”*

And why so?

*“All of us lived at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh<sup>[a]</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. We were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God....”*

A mouthful, for sure—a mindful—but here’s what Paul is saying: *The ups and downs of our lives, friends, do not dictate our joy—our joy, rather, rests with the salvation Christ has won for us.* Here—here!—is the basis for Paul’s joy—for the fact that he can honestly and genuinely pen these words. ***Through Christ—and in Christ—there is new beginning for those who trust in God’s grace....***

In a few moments time, we will hear again the invitation of our Lord to come to what we often refer to as “The Holy Table”—because, in all seriousness, it is. It is the place—as Paul himself reminds us—that speaks to a sacrifice God made—of himself, for us. A holy thing. It is a sacrifice made—as Paul reminds the Ephesians and us—not because we deserved it to be made, but rather because God decided to make it for us. This is what grace is: it is something done without regard to the merit of the one who is on the receiving end of the something: *“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ....”*

But what has God made us—alive—for?

I would wager that you and I would speak first to everlasting life, and, of course, we would be right: Through the resurrection of Christ—through the glorious event of Easter—you and I are shown the ultimate shape of the future.

But the invitation to come to this table—though made to us by our Risen Lord—also speaks to how we can live a “resurrected life” here and now, and it speaks—let me suggest—to what you and I can leave behind us, as we come here.

What is God calling you—to leave behind—to put an end to, if you like?

Here is a thought: You and I can be very much kin to Timothy. With him, we can trust that God has saved us—made us newly alive—but—then again—like him--we can have doubts about who we are....

For this is the issue facing Timothy. Paul’s correspondence—at least, what remains of it—points to Timothy as a very young recruit of the apostle—he may have been just 20 years old, scholars suggest—just out of diapers, to my thinking.... He meets Paul, we are told, during the latter’s first missionary journey--when Paul comes to Ephesus--and while we are not given specifics it is obvious that Paul sees tremendous promise in Timothy, so much so that when Paul leaves the city, he—that is, Paul—appoints Timothy to a position of church leadership there....

No small responsibility, especially for one so young, and—what is more—it seems that Timothy is quite unsure of himself. Could it be that word of this must have reached Paul—now, so many miles away? Well, here is surely a reason—and perhaps THE reason—for these letters written by Paul, to Timothy...

*“What is God calling you—to leave behind?”* A question I’ve asked. All of us, I’ve suggested, are now free to begin a new chapter of living, in the praise of what the grace of God has done for us in Christ--but taking a step forward is often not easy.

What a blessing can come our way, friends, when others help us to do just this—when you and I have a Paul in our lives....

Today your peers—and friends—on the Board of Deacons—are leading worship, something new, I am sure, for many of them—and I think they are blessing us greatly! —but—some months ago, they also met, as a group, to discern further what God wanted them to do. All of them had been nominated—and elected—by this church family to serve as deacons, and now was the time to begin to focus their areas of service. How to do this? Well, one avenue that was used was personal observation—and affirmation: The entire Board was asked to share what they knew—and saw—in one another. And I think it is safe to say that this was a beautiful—and a powerful—experience for all of them....

*“I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.”*

Paul’s words to Timothy. They speak to what he—that is, Paul—has seen in Timothy. Timothy’s abilities. Timothy’s experience. Timothy’s character. And they are words of affirmation, friends, for the gifts that God has given to Timothy are still there even if—in Timothy’s mind—they may seem missing. What a blessing it is, friends, when there is someone who sees—and continues to see—the abilities we have to make a difference—for I think we all wish to make a difference—to be a blessing.

*What do others see—in you?*

*What can you share with others, in turn, that will affirm them?*

Something so simple—and yet profound—because it points to the gifts God gives to us.

But there is more to say on this subject, for *you and I may lack for a mentor—although I hope and pray that we do not—God gives us yet a further guidance through His word—the Scriptures themselves.*

No message touching upon Paul’s affirmation of Timothy can leave out the place—indeed, the primacy—of Scripture as a means for building up Paul’s protégé:

*“Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it” and here is Paul’s reference to his mentorship of Timothy, but now there is more—and I quote—and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God<sup>[a]</sup> may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Does Scripture speak to the salvation God has won for us, in Christ? Surely it does—*but Paul makes it clear that this same salvation is also the means through which we are given a willingness—a joy—and the ability—to do good works....*

In a few moments time, we will be invited to this Holy Table. We will be reminded, in doing so, of the new beginning Christ has won for us. Today, I hope that each of you, my friends, will also be nourished—filled up—affirmed—in your ability to make a difference—to serve—to love—to be bold, if need be, ***for surely this was the blessing Timothy experienced through the letters Paul sent him—and in his reading of God’s word....*** Oh, we can feel like Timothy—at times—but—with him—let us give thanks that we are not without means—without gifts—without the Spirit working us—and through us...

And, finally today, Paul urges us to think long-term....

What can we do—through our service to God—that will bless others—and will continue to do so, friends, well beyond the act itself—even beyond our time of service?

For this is the immediate context for the second letter Paul sends to Timothy. It is a letter—as we have noted—where Paul is well aware that his time of service is nearing an end. It is a letter filled with affirmations of Timothy’s gifts. And it is a letter—more to the point—where Paul also calls Timothy to have an eye for the future:

***“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust them to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”***

Here, Paul makes a specific request of Timothy: Pick good leaders for the church—and choose people who will grow and expand the Kingdom beyond yourself...

*How can each of us—to take a cue from Paul—live our lives in such a way that what we say—and what we do—outlives us?*

You know, too often you and I can focus more upon today—than tomorrow. True, our Lord Jesus tells that today’s troubles are enough—and don’t; we all know this!—-but— all the same—if we are guided only by immediate concerns, we may also make decisions that fail to see beyond the day—that fail to plan for the week—the month—even the year ahead...

During my ministry in Scotland, the centenary of my church family occurred—we celebrated 100 years of ministry in the city of Ayr, a lovely sea-side port--and we did so in a sanctuary—on the day—that held over 600 people—its full capacity. When this same sanctuary has been built—a century before—the congregation stood at less than 100 members, however, but—nevertheless—the monies to build the church to seat over 500 people was raised. Just five families gave that money, by the way. What faith those families had—right? What trust? Surely they gave a precious sum of money; for some of them—I was told—it was pretty much the family fortune

*How can we—you and I—become more long-term oriented, in our thinking—acting—sacrificing?*

As Paul ends his last letter to Timothy, he uses the analogy of a race coming to an end—he has finished the race, he writes. He has “kept the faith,” in his words. ***But note this: Paul’s ministry has been less about harvesting—than planting.*** He started churches throughout the Roman empire—several dozen, the scholars tell us—he has recruited and trained leaders for them, among them Timothy. ***He has kept a focus on upon the future—and he has acted in such a way that these churches will grow and flourish beyond his life....***

*Today—and as we come to the Holy Table—let us ask God to grant us wisdom—and vision, friends—to plant seeds—to be the kind of people who provide the shade trees for future generations.*

*For God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be His people—be assured of this.*

*God has also blessed us from the heavenly realms—you and I do not lack for the interests, the passions—the hopes and dreams—that move us to act—and to make use of the gifts God does give us.*

*Come and be filled, today, and leave here refreshed, my friends--for the race continues for us all---and God will surely reward us at the finish line!*

Amen—and Amen!