



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 14, 2007

20th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 1:3-14

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 27

Second Lesson: 2 Timothy 1:3-14

Gospel: Luke 17:1-10

Guard the Good Deposit

When you go to the grocery store and you park the car, do you leave the car running and the keys in the car and the doors unlocked? You shut it off and lock it because you are afraid someone might take it, right? You do something to guard it and protect it.

When you get home at night and you take out the garbage, do you have to unlock the garbage can first so you can dump those banana peels and whatever else you might have in there? You don't guard the garbage can, right? Why not? If someone else wants to take it, more power to them, just get it out of the yard completely if you are going to take it, right? You don't really care if they take your rotten eggs.

The things that we are to guard are things that are important to us and things that may be in danger, right? If we don't think something is in danger, we aren't going to guard it. If it's not important to us, we aren't going to guard it.

This morning when we listen in on this last letter that Paul writes to the young pastor Timothy, we hear him say to Timothy and to us, "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you." Guard it because it is very important. Guard it because it is in danger. As you guard it, know your resources and know the challenges that you are going to face. Some of the challenges Timothy faced and the resources he had are the exact same things that you and I have.

Paul is in prison as he writes this, not like the first time around when he could freely receive visitors. When Onesimus came to Rome to find him, it took him a long time to find him. It was hard. His prison was more of a prison like we would think of this time. His first hearing at this second imprisonment in Rome had not gone well. He fully expects that soon he will be with the Lord in heaven, so he writes his letter that we have to Timothy. It's kind of like a Last Will and Testament. It's a last encouragement to this young brother in the ministry that was so very important to him.

You can kind of hear how important Timothy was in this greeting, can't you? He says to him, "Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother and then in your mother." He talks about how much he wants to see him before the Lord takes him to heaven.

It's an amazing thing what Paul says about Timothy. I think it is pointing Timothy and us to one of the resources that God gives us. That is our fellow Christians. We should treasure our fellow Christians and find them as a source of joy, a source of encouragement. He knows he is going to meet the Lord soon, but he knows Satan is going to be attacking him, so everyone else had left him except Luke, and he wants Timothy to come and see him before he goes so that he can find encouragement from his brother in the faith.

That is an incredible example that Paul puts forward for us to follow. And to be perfectly honest, I'm not so sure we always see our fellow believers as "resources" as we guard the good deposit of the gospel or the faith that the gospel has created in our hearts. I don't know that we always look at one another as that resource. Why is that? I think sometimes when we see each other, we don't see a fellow saint of God who loves Christ and who loves us and wants to encourage us. I think sometimes our sinful nature instead reminds us of the things that other person has said or done that upset us or irritates us. Think about it—when you see people, do you think, "Boy, I'm glad I have these brothers and sisters in the faith," or do you see some people in the basement before or after church and think, "That is the person that didn't like my idea at the last committee meeting. That is the person that complained about this or that about something I had done. That is the person who attacked the thing that I had done that I was so proud of." Which comes to mind faster?

Maybe sometimes when we are at the height of our faith, we see each other and think, "Boy, it's great to be a Christian and have these brothers and sisters in the faith." But there are times when our sinful nature wins out and we don't see each other as a resource. We see each other almost as an enemy instead of Satan as our enemy. And for that, we are the poorer, and Satan will use that to keep us from building each other up and encouraging each other. Seeing each other as dearly loved brothers and sisters in the faith—that is something that we are challenged at times to do. We don't always do that.

I will give you an example. I see this all the time. In Bible study this morning we had a question, "Share with the group an example of when you were chastened by God when he was doing something to lead you closer to him that was kind of tough to endure and how it also was a blessing to you at the same time." And—that is the same response I got, the one you just gave me. No one was willing to share. Same thing Thursday night—no one was willing to share. Have we never been chastened by God? Have we never been blessed by God at the same time? I don't buy that. But, are we fearful of opening ourselves up to our brothers and sisters in the faith that they might think less of us? Are we frightened by them if they know us more closely or more intimately? And because of that fear, do we keep silent and not say, "This was as tough as nails, but God helped me through it and here is what he did and rejoice with me that he has done this for me." Or do we say, "I hope we change the subject soon. This is uncomfortable."

Are we the better for our silence, or have we missed an opportunity for God to strengthen us so that we can guard the good deposit.

Another resource that Paul points Timothy and us to is the One who has created those brothers and sisters in the faith, right? He tells them, “Don’t be ashamed to testify about me.” That is one of the challenges, right?—being timid. God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a power of love and of self discipline. So don’t be timid, but speak out. Confess and profess and teach Christ crucified as the answer to everything. That grace that God gave us before the beginning of time is the resource that helps us as we are challenged at times to be timid or ashamed of the gospel and not wanting to speak.

Now for Timothy, timidity might have been something that was a character trait he had and he had to be encouraged, or it could have been because he was so young and being among those that were older than him, it was natural for him to be more timid and not to speak out when he should. Another reason he might have been fearful is—look what happened to Paul. Paul was not timid and Paul was in prison. Paul was not ashamed to speak of the gospel and it got him in prison. So now when Timothy had the opportunity to stand up and profess Christ and boldly call sin, sin, and then point people back to the One whose grace from before the beginning of time saved them, it might have been a challenge for him to do so. So Paul says to recognize that challenge, but find the resource, not of Paul, but of the One, the power of God that saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything that we had done, but because of his own purpose and grace.

That is where his strength would be found, not in himself, but that spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline. The power is God’s. The love is the love God has shown us that flows through us to our fellow believers and to others. Self discipline is the self discipline to be in the Word so that we can answer the questions and answer the challenges that are presented. How often aren’t you and I tempted to be timid and not call sin, sin, because we don’t want to upset someone? How often do we value friendships or having someone else think well of us above speaking God’s Word in power, in love, and self discipline. How often do we want the subject to change because we don’t want to because we are timid?

When we are timid, it’s because we aren’t as focused on God and what God has done for us in Christ as we are on the struggles or the difficulties that might result from living for God. That same challenge that faced Timothy and Paul faces us. It might not face us in the form of prison, but it certainly faces us with the form of losing a friend or having someone give us the cold shoulder for the next five years because we said sin is sin.

So we ask God to give us a spirit of love. Love for that person’s soul that goes beyond our own comfort; a love for having that person right with God instead of having them right with us. When God gives us that spirit of love for souls that is the same love that he had that led him to leave heaven, live in our place, die in our place, and live in their place and die in their place, to take away sins, then we have that spirit of power. Then we can be a herald and an apostle and a teacher. Then we can proclaim Christ faithfully and fully. We find that ability as we make use of the self discipline to be in the Word, to be with the Word, to sharpen one another as iron sharpens iron, to spend time growing together and building one another up so that we can guard the good deposit, and not only guard it, but share it with others.

Have we failed? Has each and every one of us failed in this task? Sure. But Christ died also for that sin. And because Christ died for that sin, we are forgiven, we are restored, and through his Word and his Sacraments, through his body and blood, he renews us so that we have the spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline so that we set aside our timidity and speak the Word of God faithfully, boldly and lovingly.

That is how we guard the good deposit.