

Proper 23 Year C

10/13/2019

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7; Psalm 66:1-11; 2 Timothy 2:8-15; Luke 17:11-19

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On this feast day of our namesake and patron saint...

St. Edward the Confessor...

we will continue our journey through St. Paul's second letter to his disciple Timothy.

We turn the pages from last week in the first chapter to this week where in the second chapter Paul gives the quickest and most concise statement about the Gospel.

It really is the briefest statement you will ever hear concerning the gospel.

He writes:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel...

Most of us would probably not explain the Gospel in those exact terms...

But to a first century Jew... this was important.

The gospel comes through Jesus Christ.

The hope is found in the resurrection.

And it fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

That's the gospel.

And that's the gospel that Paul preached.

And that's the gospel for which Paul suffered all kinds of hardship, torture, and struggle.

It would ultimately cost him his life as a martyr.

Paul lived out what he preached as he spoke these words to Timothy.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

All of these phrases have in view Christ's resurrection and our future resurrection.

St. Paul was crucified with Christ... he did not live for his own glory.

Paul endured the hardship that Christ predicted.

When Jesus said:

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15)

Paul also refused to deny Jesus Christ.

Again, echoing the words of Jesus... who said:

whoever denies me before men,

I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:33)

And even in moments of doubt... Jesus is still faithful...

Faithful to go through a secret trial...

Faithful to be tortured...

Faithful to walk the road of Calvary...

To die on the cross...

Even knowing that many would be reject him...

He died... fully God and fully man.

he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

This is the truth that Paul reminds us of.

They are words of power.

They are words of hope.

They are words of sacrificial love.

And yet so often we can lose sight of such truth... of such power...

And get caught up in the politics of the church...

The gossip of the parish...

The frustration over words.

Paul writes:

Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening.

Now Paul is saying more than just the politics and gossip of the church...

The words used in those circumstances are important...

But Paul has more in mind.

Particularly he has the word of the gospel in mind.

He has holy scripture in mind.

That's the context.

For instance, Paul mentions the resurrection.

He said ...*remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead...*

Some academics and clergy would suggest that it doesn't really matter if the resurrection of Jesus really happened...

(a few even in our own denomination would take this position).

They suggest that it doesn't matter if Jesus Christ really rose from the grave... but what's important is the spiritual experience that we have by believing in such a story.

What's important is how our lives change because of the story... not if the story really happened or not.

This idea... this *wrangling over words*... is not a new phenomenon. Some thought similar ideas about the resurrection of our Lord about a hundred years after Paul.¹

So, is it important that Jesus really did rise from the grave?

The resurrection is the climax of history.

Combined with the crucifixion, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is essential to the Christian faith. Why?

The resurrection declares the goodness of the physical creation...

it's not just a spiritual experience...

but a theologically charged statement about the physical world.

The resurrection declares the promise of God to renew his creation.

The resurrection proclaims the justice of God... Christ...

who was without sin... took on our sin...

and death could not keep him in the grave.

The resurrection gives us hope that we too would rise from the grave.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone, The Pastoral Letters* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003, 2004), 107.

The resurrection was the fulfillment of the prophecies that Jesus Christ predicted concerning himself.

Without the resurrection Jesus Christ would be a false prophet.

Without the resurrection there would be no need to expect a second coming.

Without the resurrection the world would never be put to rights at the end of the age.

And to declare that the resurrection is about my spiritual experience or my spiritual transformation is to take the focus of the resurrection away from God, the gospel, and the world...
and to put that focus on me and my experience.

Typically, when we mis-read scripture...

we inevitably put the focus on ourselves.

We usually create or imagine a God in our likeness...

Not a God who created us in his likeness.

There is no church... without the resurrection.

The whole hope of the Gospel is lost without the resurrection.

This is why Paul eight verses later writes:

Have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth... (2 Timothy 2:23-25)

Understanding the word of God... the gospel of Jesus Christ is important.

The early church... as we read in the book of Acts... gathered together for prayers, fellowship, communion and it says (in Acts 2:42):

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

It doesn't say... and everyone in the church came up with their own interpretation.

We understand the words of God through the church...

The church today...

And the church through the years... we call it the tradition...

So, what is asked of us?

What is our role in all of this?

How are we to discern the words of God?

Our passage from 2 Timothy ends with this verse:

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him,
a worker who has no need to be ashamed,
rightly explaining the word of truth.*

Last week Paul mentioned in our second reading:

Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord (2 Timothy 1:1-14)

Today he mentions that word again... **ashamed**.

It has to do with our belief as Christians...

what we believe about the Lord Jesus Christ...

and how we confess that belief to the people around us.

And in our text today it is also about the word of truth.

When Paul writes *present yourself to God as one approved* it is as an apprentice preparing and training for an examination.

He must figure out what standards of knowledge, expository skill, historical and literary judgment, and spiritual understanding are required for the job... make sure they possess the skills...

then you will be an *unashamed workman*.²

² Ibid., 108.

When Tera and I were married we left our hometown and travelled to San Antonio, Texas so that we both could go to college.

We had a small trailer that we rented on campus.

It came mostly furnished.

However, as is usual in college, we started to collect books and found ourselves in need of a bookshelf.

Wanting to save money... I decided to build one.

I bought some wood, a hammer, some nails, and a saw.

I then got to work.

And It didn't take me long. And my wife could tell.

The bookshelf was wobbly, it was crooked, and it looked like what it was – nailed together 2x4's and plywood.

If you ask Tera about this bookshelf... she would probably laugh.

It's not my best moment...

I'm a bit ashamed of that so-called bookshelf.

Now... in our current residence... our book collection has increased substantially since my very early 20's.

We have a great space in our living room where bookshelves were needed.

And guess what?

I'm not building them.

A friend who is a carpenter is building them. He's a real professional. These don't wobble, they aren't crooked, and they have all the finishing touches on them.

They look great and will do the job for many, many years.

My friend has nothing to be ashamed of.

That's the kind of effect Paul wants us to strive for in our understanding and teaching of scripture and the gospel.

Don't settle for the wobbly bookshelves.

But study to be like the professional carpenter.

Learn to rightly divide the word of truth...

Carve out a straight path on God's holy scriptures...

And don't get caught up in the *wrangling over words which does no good but only ruins those who are listening.*

May we be students of God's holy word.

May we not be ashamed of the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And may we boldly and graciously share the good news of God to our neighbors... to the clerk at the store... to our doctors... to our friends... to our family.

Amen.