

Sermon: Be faithful

2 Timothy 2:1-15

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Intro

Last week I spoke about the importance of holding on to the faith that has been the heart of the church throughout the centuries. Hold on to the 'dogma', and do so with an upright heart, with faith and love in Jesus Christ. Faith is both a matter of content, and also of sincerity of the heart.

This faith connects us with the believers before us – even those already in heaven – and it connects us with future generations of believers. This faith is also our secure anchor into heaven, where it connects us with God – Father Son and Spirit. This faith gives us strength to live by when the days are hard.

Paul wrote his letter to Timothy as a sort of testament; he knew his time to die was near, as he was imprisoned in Rome. In his final will, he urged Timothy to stick faithfully to the Gospel as Paul had taught him.

Now, in chapter 2 that we read this morning, Paul continues to urge Timothy to hold on to this faith. First, he urges him to preach what he had heard from Paul, and nothing else. Secondly, he urges him to serve God with guts even when the times are hard. And thirdly, he points to the fact that God is faithful - a promising thought, but scary at the same time.

1 Preach what you heard from me (2:1-2)

First, preach what you heard from me.

There was no doubt what Paul preached, because there were witnesses to his preaching.

And we, in our days, are lucky that we now even have the collection of Paul's letters, beside the 4 gospels and some other letters of apostles in a book. Praise God for the art of printing books. This book – the collection of the acts and words of Jesus and the apostles - is our rule of faith.

The message of the church, handed over throughout the centuries, must always be measured against this measuring rod.

The task of bishop Timothy is to teach people this message – to teach able people who in their turn can teach others again. This is not just a nice strategy for evangelism or so - Paul is telling Timothy that he must prepare new church leaders – who in their turn must be able to raise a new generation of church leaders. Paul is sowing the seeds here for what later would be called apostolic succession.

The goal of this succession is to ensure that the original message of the earliest church would be handed over faithfully. Bishops who do not hold on to this original message, are gravely wrong as they are supposed to be the guardians of the Biblical message.

2 Serve with guts (2:3-7)

It is not always easy to hold on to this message. In times of Paul and Timothy, it was not good for popularity. Paul was about to die in prison, and Timothy was in danger as well.

As even in our days, Christians suffer for their faith. In western societies we do not suffer much more than being seen as outdated, people of the past. That may be a dreadful feeling, but not life threatening. It does maybe threaten our honor.

In many societies, like in Egypt, it can be more painful. People die – not because of their words or behavior, but simply because they carry the name of Jesus. Because they belong to the community of Jesus.

So secondly, Paul tells Timothy to have guts. This is not a bad message for us either. Paul is bringing this message home by using three examples.

Be like a soldier -

Be like an athlete -

Be like a farmer -

A soldier accepts suffering for the sake of his country; it is part of the job to accept risks and dangers. "Timothy, as a Christian, and as a leader, there is no way around it. You have accepted the

job – you have faith in Christ – so your life is set on a risky course.”

The only aim of the soldier is to satisfy the one who enlisted him – he has chosen a life that is very different from the normal civilian life. With this choice comes a price. Jesus Christ has enlisted us as his followers – do not expect life to be easy. And do not say no when it gets hard. In times of war, when soldiers refuse to obey, they may face the firing squad. So obey and do not be wiped out from the army of Jesus Christ.

Then we have the example of the athlete. Paul says that an athlete is only able to get the price, if he competes by the rules, by the book. How useless to train and suffer and in the end, even though you seem to be successful, not to get the price!

We have to run by the book. We received rules from our Lord. You could argue that our rule-book is the whole bible.

I think, in the context of what Paul writes to Timothy, he means more specifically, the rule that Timothy has to stick to the Gospel as Paul taught him.

The price that awaits Timothy, and us, is related to how we walk our course of life by this rule. Being prepared to suffer is not enough. We need to do it with the right faith, and with a personal commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ.

And the farmer works hard as well – farming in the old days was back braking hard. But there was a joy involved – the farmer had immediate access to food. He was the first one to enjoy the crops.

“Timothy, at times your life may seem to be back braking, too hard. But be encouraged. God will feed you in the end with all you need.”

Be like a soldier, an athlete, a farmer: worry only about serving our Lord; do this by holding on wholeheartedly to the faith, to the right faith; and though this may be extremely tough at times – the great price is waiting for you.

3 God is faithful

Paul then, thirdly, continues about this price that awaits us. (2:8-13)

He mentions his own suffering, but encourages himself and Timothy by telling him to remember something. In hard days, it is extra important to use your mind and not allow your feelings to drag you into the pit.

Remember, think, do not forget...

Remember what? That Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that he is descended from David. That there is salvation in Jesus Christ with eternal glory.

He is descended from David – this seems to focus the mind on the humanity of Jesus. He was a true human being, and he suffered much more than we can ever imagine. But he held on to the faith and also rose from the dead.

This life here is not all there is. Yes, it can be full of misery – but lift up your head – salvation awaits us with eternal glory. The resurrection of Jesus is our guarantee that there is life after death.

Paul then quotes what was probably a song, in the verses 11-13.

‘If he have died with him, we shall also live with him.’

This refers to our baptism, so often compared with death by Paul. Our baptism put us on the course with Christ – as soldiers who have to live for the one who hired them.

But it also reminds Timothy that death as a martyr is not the end – die with Christ, and you will live with Christ.

For us, martyrdom does not seem a serious option. But the idea of Paul is clear: be connected with Jesus Christ in this life, and we are connected with him in the life hereafter. If the anchor of our faith is in heaven today, we will never be disconnected from Jesus Christ and from heaven, whatever happens to us.

If we endure with him, we will reign with him, just as the athlete gets the price if he plays by the rules.

Play by the rules? That means: hold on to that deposit of faith that the church has handed over from generation to generation. Hold on to what we learned about Jesus Christ, and we are forever connected with God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. And we are even connected with all those who died before us in the faith – and we are con-

nected with all to come. One great worldwide eternal family.

This faith of the church, if cherished in our hearts, connects us forever with eternity. We shall live with Christ; we shall reign with him, together with all our friends and relatives of the past, and all those who live today, and even those who are still to be born, if only they carry this same deposit of the faith in their hearts.

But Paul also warns Timothy. If we deny Christ, he will also deny us. That is not a happy ending. This is a warning!

Paul summarises the promise and the warning by saying, "if we become faithless, God remains faithful". This means, God will be faithful to his word. He does what he says.

He has promised great joy and blessings for those who hold on to the faith that we were taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles; but he warns that when we one day enter into the throne room of God – Jesus Christ will not come to our salvation if in this life, we have not held on to him in faith.

This is what Jesus told his disciples; this is the stern warning throughout the bible. This is the

word of God. And he will be faithful to his word. We can count on him to do exactly in accordance with his words.

Conclusion

So, Timothy, and believers here in Heliopolis – make sure to hold on to that eternal faith of God, preached by the prophets, preached by Jesus Christ, preached by the apostles, preached by the church throughout the ages.

May that faith be taught in our churches. And may we personally wholeheartedly link our lives with this faith in Jesus Christ

That may be hard at times – life as a Christian is not always easy. But the promises are greater. The promise of eternal life with all those we love. The promise of eternal glory in the presence of God Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So be committed as a soldier, run by the book of faith as an athlete; break your back, if times are hard, like a farmer. But God will welcome you with his amazing reward – to be with Him, now and forever.

Amen