

Sunday, September 18, 2016

Paul's letter in first Timothy provides us, the reader, with insight into Paul's role as understood by his followers, as a pastor of pastors. Paul was a leader who provided for continued leadership in the churches of his time.

Timothy had been tasked with heading the Macedonian churches and Paul offered directives for the congregations on such matters as guiding and instructing new members. False ideas had entered the scene and were perceived as menacing and so Timothy was called to be alert and active in repelling these false ideas.

The specific reading from 1 Timothy chapter 2 this morning can be seen as a part of an early manual of the church regarding prayer. The hope is that through a world of good government, religious tolerance, and tranquil times, Christian will be free to practice their religion and uphold high moral values.

1 Timothy 2:1-7

¹The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know.

²Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. ³This is the way our Savior God wants us to live.

⁴He wants not only us but everyone saved, you know, everyone to get to know the truth we've learned: ⁵that there's one God and only one, and one Priest-Mediator between God and us—Jesus, ⁶who offered himself in exchange for everyone held captive by sin, to set them all free. Eventually the news is going to get out. ⁷This and this only has been my appointed work: getting this news to those who have never heard of God, and explaining how it works by simple faith and plain truth.

Our reading this morning continues our exploration of Luke's Gospel. This is a rather interesting and sometimes confusing parable but it seems to point out that people of faith have something to learn from those who ascribe to the rules and values of a society that values possessions and money over and above all else. The lesson seems to be that people of faith are encouraged to use all that one has at their disposal for the security of one's future. This can be a lesson that we all need to learn, although as with many of Jesus' teachings the story itself gets turned on its head.

Luke 16:1-13

¹Jesus said to his disciples, "There was once a rich man who had a manager. He got reports that the manager had been taking advantage of his position by running up huge personal expenses. ²So he called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? You're fired. And I want a complete audit of your books.'

³"The manager said to himself, 'What am I going to do? I've lost my job as manager. I'm not strong enough for a laboring job, and I'm too proud to beg ⁴Ah, I've got a plan. Here's what I'll do then when I'm turned out into the street, people will take me into their houses.'

⁵"Then he went at it. One after another, he called in the people who were in debt to his master. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶"He replied, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.'

"The manager said, 'Here, take your bill, sit down here—quick now—write fifty.'

⁷“To the next he said, ‘And you, what do you owe?’

“He answered, ‘A hundred sacks of wheat.’

“He said, ‘Take your bill, write in eighty.’

⁸“Now here’s a surprise: The master praised the crooked manager! And why? Because he knew how to look after himself. Streetwise people are smarter in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. ⁹I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is right—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, to concentrate your attention on the bare essentials, so you’ll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behavior.”

¹⁰Jesus went on to make these comments:

If you’re honest in small things,
you’ll be honest in big things;

¹¹If you’re a crook in small things,
you’ll be a crook in big things.

¹²If you’re not honest in small jobs,
who will put you in charge of the store?

¹³No worker can serve two bosses:
He’ll either hate the first and love the second
Or adore the first and despise the second.
You can’t serve both God and the Bank.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “And so we pray!”

One night I am sure that I was accosted by the unknown. It was late, very late one night and I found myself sitting on a wing chair in the living room. Just sitting alone. A short while later I became aware of the fact that at some point I must have gone into my sons bedrooms and gathered them in my arms and I had one on each knee as they soundly slept against my chest. I could feel their breathing as their little chests rose and fell. As I sat there I became aware of the fact that I knew nothing at that moment, lost adrift in a sea of confusion and doubt, and especially unsure of what the morning would bring, not only for myself, but also for my sons.

It was one of those times when I doubted everything. If I were really honest as I sat in the chair I could feel the darkness pressing in on me. I was almost as if the darkness itself had a presence. Have you ever had one of those experiences, where it is so dark that it almost seems to be alive and if you look long and hard enough you could see it moving. Now let me be clear this is not some horror story, I can’t really do horror stories, but rather it is a story of being empty because I felt as if I had nothing. There was truly nothing left and I truly did not know anything anymore. Then in a moment this feeling came over me and I knew that I was not alone, I knew that I was loved. It was like I was being enveloped in the warm embrace of something that I could not see, something that I could not comprehend, but I knew it was there. I knew something that I had never known before.

A very mystical experience right?

Well how does that fit in with our world of today? In reality we live in a world that struggles to value anything that cannot be measured and quantified. And this age has become a very personal age too. It was not that long ago when you wanted to contact someone you had to call their home, if they were not home you could not contact them until they had arrived home, not only that, but if a call came in you needed to listen to hear if it was your ring, because there was more than one household that was attached to each line.

Now communication has become one on one. You want to talk to someone, you just pick up your cell phone, wherever you are, and you call them wherever they are, almost anywhere on the planet. It is the age of technology, when we have instant access to information and to each other, all around the world. There was a time when we waited. Years ago when something happened on the other side of the world it would take time for it to hit the news services and then once it did, it would take time to be written up and then published and distributed. That is not the case today. Information is spread instantaneously like the beating of a drum.

Canadian Marshall McLuhan states it in this way, "These new media of ours....have made our world into a single unit...the world is now like a continually sounding tribal drum, where everyone gets the message all the time."

A princess gets married in England and**(drum - boom, boom, boom)** goes the drum and everyone knows about it.

A celebrity gets arrested and....**(drum - boom, boom, boom)** goes the drum and it is all over twitter and facebook.

A natural disaster takes place and....**(drum - boom, boom, boom)** goes the drum and aid agencies are mobilized.

(drumming continues as I speak) Eventually the booming sounds of the drum can overcome all other noise.

But we need to stop at some point.

I think that in many ways most of us understand that we are called to something more, maybe we can even say something deeper.

This can be the challenge that we face in this world of ours. This world that is many ways skeptical of those things that transcend what we can see, touch, taste, or quantify.

Our reading from 1Timothy written by Paul to the community in Macedonia gives us a hint to what this deeper might entail. It begins with a call to prayer. But what does that mean?

Is prayer something that only happens when we enter into a place like this, into a church and the community that gathers, or is it something more?

When we examine the life of Jesus we find something very interesting. Let's take a look at our reading this morning. In the reading Jesus is trying to make an important point about using everything in our lives to help us to live as God challenges us to live. Now I suppose that it would have been easy for Jesus to just say that, but as we examine the Gospel's we find that Jesus usually answers a question with another question or a story that needs to be worked out, Jesus very rarely if ever gives a direct answer.

So when the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, what was Jesus response?

Jesus gave the disciples the prayer that we use every Sunday here are Windsor Park United, what we have called the Lord's Prayer.

And so I wonder if when Jesus gave us this prayer if it was meant to be the be all and end of all for prayer or if it was meant to be a bit more.

Rick Morley, pastor who has the blog A Garden Path, says the following, " 2000 years later and I've finally figured out the Lord's Prayer (maybe) (ok not really)" he then goes on to ask this same question and then reflects on how taking this prayer as all that there was to prayer in the following way, "If you asked someone how to make wonderfully flaky and buttery puff pastry, and they gave you a short ingredient list and then told you to throw it all in the oven for a little bit, you'd want more detail. If you asked someone to teach you how to fly a jumbo jet aircraft, and they told you about six knobs and levers to pull and twist, and that that was all there was to it, you might be a little skeptical."

So Bible Adventures will be looking at the Lord's Prayer for the next number of weeks and I hope that as they explore they begin to see that this prayer given to us by Jesus is only the beginning. It is a way for us as Christians to take a step back and to enter into a place where we might be able to centre ourselves and come closer to God. When we do this we might begin to hear God speaking to us. Isaiah 30:21 states , "And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind, you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

It is our challenge in this world of mass technology, this world of instantaneous communication, this world which in many ways is full of confusion, is to find a way to enter those spaces where God can be heard.

During our sacrament of baptism this morning we do just that, we prepare our hearts to receive the grace of God as we, in community, welcomed Emmett with the sacrament of Baptism. God challenges us to find those sacred moments every day. Those moments when we prepare our hearts, as Jesus taught us, and we open ourselves up to the voice of God in our lives.

When we do this, we can be led into places of deep relationship with God and with each other.

And so as Christians we wait, we look for those places where the drum has become quieter, and then we are challenged to open our hearts to hear God. We pray. Then we follow those prayers, we follow God's voice back into the world hoping that through our presence we can become a force of change. So let us continue to enter into that place of prayer.