

Trinity Lutheran Church, Gillette, WY
October 14, 2007

Perseverance in Faith

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen. The text for today comes from the Epistle, which was read earlier.

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus...” This is what Paul writes to Timothy at the beginning of our text. These were words which were very ironic for St. Paul. As he awaited execution in a Roman jail, despite all that Paul was facing – death, the end of his ministry, abandonment by most of his friends for fear of persecution – he faithfully directed his spiritual son Timothy to the hope that is in Christ. He didn't care about his own life right now; he was focused on the young pastor Timothy and his church at Ephesus.

That is the message of every pastor of the Gospel: *“be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”* That is the message which we need to hear day in and day out. That was one of the three *solas* of Martin Luther, *sola gratia*, grace alone. The basis for Luther's *sola gratia* were two verses which St. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Why the focus on these two verses in all of Scripture? Why did St. Paul, when facing his own death, instead focus on Timothy and Ephesus? The answer to this question is two-fold. First, because of God, we have grace. All of this goes back to the Garden of Eden. When God made man, there was one simple rule which Adam and Eve

were to follow: *“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”* One simple rule for eternal paradise and Adam and Eve broke it. They were tempted by Satan to become like God. Because of that temptation, Eve broke the law of God. When she gave the fruit to her husband Adam, he broke the law of God. From that moment on, instead of **becoming** like God, they **feared** God. Instead of becoming **closer** to God, they became **separated** from God.

For Adam and Eve, they deserved death, wrath, and eternal condemnation. Instead, they received forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. What they received was true grace – unmerited divine assistance given for regeneration or sanctification. That is what you and I have received. Do we deserve it? Absolutely not! Did we receive it? Absolutely yes! Where did we receive it? We received it at the cross of Jesus. We received it through the waters of Holy Baptism and we continue to receive it each and every time we come to the Lord's Table to receive Christ's body and blood, given for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

That is why Paul tells Timothy, *“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...”* Isn't it taken for granted that Christians remember Jesus Christ? Paul knows, however, that in the stress of life on earth and even in the noise of religious work it is all too easy to forget Jesus Christ. Christians need to be encouraged to have Jesus and His saving work in mind continually. We need to remember at all times and in all places that Jesus Christ is indeed risen from the dead. It is a constant remembrance of who Jesus Christ is and what it is that Jesus Christ has done: that He is the very Son of God and that “he has

redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.”

These words which Martin Luther wrote are not just mere words. These are words which every Christian needs to hear because they say exactly what it is that Jesus Christ has done for us. Words which sound so simple to us were words which meant a great deal to Luther. When the Roman Catholic Church was insisting that our salvation came from Jesus Christ **AND** the works which we did, it caused Luther to question the faith. Is Jesus truly the Son of God? If He is, then His life, death, and resurrection is all sufficient for salvation. If He is not, then salvation depended on Luther to some extent and he knew that he was a sinner and could not, as he says, “by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.”

The resurrection assures us that our sins are paid for and we are forgiven. It guarantees that Jesus has saved us! Romans 4:25 says, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” For this reason Paul regularly puts the resurrection of Jesus in the spotlight, not just as a reminder of what Christ did for us, but that it was Christ and Christ alone who could bring about true salvation.

As Paul writes this letter to Timothy, he is “*bound with chains as a criminal.*” He is no longer able to pastor a congregation. He can no longer preach the Word of God to the people as he once did. That responsibility now lies with men like Timothy. While Paul is bound, he makes a statement to Timothy which sounds like a no-brainer: “*But the word of God is not bound!*” Paul says much about the power of God's Word in this one little sentence. God will see to it that His Word does its work in spite of human

opposition! The evangelist may have a ball and chain on his leg, but the message of Jesus is off and running. We need not become discouraged when it looks bleak for Christianity. God's Word is still at work. No human power can suppress it.

For Paul, he knew what was at stake: the salvation of the Church. He risked his own life, time and time again to preach the Gospel. He went on three missionary journeys for the Gospel's sake. He faced prison time on multiple occasions. Now, his life has culminated in another prison sentence. However, he doesn't care. He reminds Timothy why he has done what he has done: *"I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."* Concern for the salvation of these elect is for Paul another motive for perseverance in Christian ministry. He has the eyes of Jesus toward the lost. He has a love for the lost that moves him to be a slave to everyone and to become all things to all men. He is more concerned with evangelizing the world than with his own personal comfort, safety or wealth. He truly has the Christ-like concern for those who have come to faith in Christ and for those who have not.

Can it be said of us that we would endure everything for the sake of the elect? Or, are we likely to be cool toward mission work when there is a personal cost or sacrifice? Are we willing to forsake our own life for the lives of those outside of Christ, just as Paul did? I'm sure that the answer to the question is no, we aren't willing to preach the Gospel if a personal cost or sacrifice is needed on our part. Even if we are not, there was one who was willing to preach the Gospel, regardless of a personal cost or sacrifice.

Jesus Christ, willingly preached the Gospel. He was, is, and always will be the

Gospel. He is the Good News sent from God the Father. He came to bring life when we were meant to inherit death. He came to bring salvation when we were meant to inherit wrath. He knew the risks involved in His mission, that of the Father, to bring all mankind to Him. He knew that this would require people to reject Him. He knew that this would require Him to be beaten and scourged. Ultimately, He knew that this would end in His death, yet He continued to do the Father's will.

We persevere in our faith, just as Christ Jesus persevered in His. We persevere because of the final words of St. Paul: *“If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him...”* We have the faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord, given to us by the Holy Spirit at our Baptism. Let this be focus of our lives, for now and for all eternity. In the name of Jesus, amen.

Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, amen.