

Sermon for October 27, 2013 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18 (AAT)

Theme: Keep the Faith!

- 1) *In times of trouble and disappointment*
- 2) *Know that the LORD is with you*
- 3) *Carrying you home to be with Him.*

⁶ *I'm now being sacrificed, and it's time for me to leave.* ⁷ *I fought the good fight, I ran the race, I kept the faith.*
⁸ *Now there is waiting for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only me but all who love to see Him come again. . .* ¹⁶ *The first time I had to defend myself, no one came to help me, but everyone deserted me — may it not be held against them.* ¹⁷ *But the Lord stood by me and gave me the strength to finish my preaching so that all the non-Jews would hear it. I was rescued from the lion's mouth.* ¹⁸ *The Lord will rescue me from all the evil that is done and will save me and take me to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever. Amen.*

We have come to the end. On this last Sunday in October we will consider Paul's final encouragement for Timothy. Paul's brief reflection of his life and hope for the future offers us great comfort as we face a world that is becoming more and more godless.

We not only face the problem of persecution from a world that hates us. Sometimes the most trying thing to our faith is when our friends abandon us when we need them the most. In this world of sin, we can expect disappointment – even from fellow Christians. Paul knows how this can affect us. This is why His final encouragement is to **Keep the faith.** *In times of trouble and disappointment, know that the LORD is with you – carrying you home to be with Him.*

Part One: In times of trouble and disappointment.

Our text begins with the apostle Paul telling Timothy: *I'm now being sacrificed, and it's time for me to leave.*

The apostle Paul saw his life as one big “thank you” offering to God. Everything he suffered, he suffered for Jesus. Every path he pursued he pursued for Christ. And why? Was it to earn salvation? No, rather because Paul was overwhelmed by God's love – a love that was willing to send His one and only Son to the cross to save a sinner like him!

Paul encourages all Christians to have the same outlook that He had. Because Jesus sacrificed himself to save us, Paul says in his letter to the Romans: *I appeal to you, fellow Christians, by the mercies of God, to give your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, and so worship Him. (Romans 12:1, AAT)* In other words, live your life as if it belonged to Christ because, truth be told, it does belong to Christ. Glorify Jesus and his love for you in your speech and actions. Dedicate your life to thanking Christ, just as He dedicated his life to saving you.

Paul's life was coming to an end. He was about to die in service to the LORD. As He looks back on his life, he can say: ⁷ *I fought the good fight, I ran the race, I kept the faith.*

Like an Olympic boxer the apostle Paul endured a lot of beatings. Like an Olympic runner, Paul felt the pain of being pushed to the point of breaking – but he endured. He persevered.

Probably one of the hardest things he faced was his trial before Nero’s court. Not only did he face the scrutinizing eyes of Nero – who was bent on destroying Christianity. The worst part about this trial is what he describes in verse 16: *The first time I had to defend myself, no one came to help me, but everyone deserted me.*

There are times when our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ disappoint us. Maybe we needed someone to notice that we were hurting, someone to show a little compassion, and no one did. Maybe we needed help with some project at Church but no one offered any. Maybe we were sick and no one visited us. When things like this happen, the devil uses this opportunity to tempt us: is it really worth being a Christian? Look, your brothers and sisters don’t care about you, why should you care about them? Maybe the world is right – the Church is filled with nothing but hypocrites. Maybe you should just move on.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Apostle Paul certainly understood such disappointment. I mean, imagine not a single person coming to testify on your behalf as you stand trial before the Roman emperor who is bent on killing you. Paul needed help and not a single person came. We can just imagine the devil tempting Paul with thoughts like: where are all the people you shared the Gospel with now? Where are your “brothers and sisters” in Christ? Your message obviously didn’t work. If they aren’t willing to stand by you now, what good is your preaching?”

So what does Paul do? Does He curse his fellow Christians out? Does he complain to Timothy – telling him not to trust them? Does he give up or plan to get even – thinking that if they ever need his help, he won’t offer it?

No, instead he prays for their forgiveness: *may it not be held against them.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, learn from the apostle Paul to pray for those who disappoint you. Ask the LORD to forgive them and lead them to see the needs of others. This is the attitude God wants us to have – even towards those who disappoint us. Jesus wants us to love and pray for them, just as He prayed from the cross: *“Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34, AAT)*

Part Two: *Know that the LORD is with you*

But how can we do this? What gave the apostle Paul the strength to endure, and the heart to pray for those who abandoned him when He needed them the most?

Our sermon text mentions two things. The first is this: *Now there is waiting for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only me but all who love to see Him come again.*

Paul looked forward to the day he would receive a glorified body and live with the LORD and all the saints in the perfect paradise that God will grant all believers at the end of time. Paul knew that when He died, his soul would be received by God. He would be at rest. He would live in victory – in perfect peace with all who believed in the LORD.

And what assured Paul this crown of righteousness would be waiting for him at the end of his life? Was it his own perseverance and work? No, rather Paul trusted that Jesus himself earned heaven for everyone through his life, death and resurrection. The Bible clearly says that all who repent of sin and trust in Christ alone for forgiveness will be saved and receive eternal life as their inheritance. Paul's confidence was in Christ – not only to deliver him to heaven, but also to stand by him now in all his trials.

When speaking of those trials, the apostle says: *But the Lord stood by me and gave me the strength to finish my preaching so that all the non-Jews would hear it. I was rescued from the lion's mouth.*

Even though his Christian family seemed to have abandon Paul to his fate – probably out of fear of what would happen to them - the apostle was convinced that He was not alone. Though unseen by Nero or anyone else at the hearing, Jesus himself stood beside Paul. He held Paul in his arms and opened his mouth to speak. He strengthened Paul – giving him the very words to say to Nero and all others gathered at that hearing. The news of Paul's boldness before Nero helped strengthen the whole Church that was scared of persecution that now began in earnest. Paul was rescued from the lion's mouth – he was rescued from the trap the devil set to get him to despair and give up.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your Savior has promised: *"I am with you always until the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20, AAT) Take comfort in this fact. Just as Jesus helped Paul, so He promises to help you. He will stand with you when no one else will. He will stand with you when you are sick. He will sustain you when you do the thankless jobs for Him that no one else seems to want to do. He will give you the words to say when people question what you believe. Jesus promises to be with us always, and this promise sustains us in the worst of times. Jesus' promise moves us to stay in the Word – to keep the faith; confident that He will keep all his promises and deliver us home to heaven.

Part 3: Carrying you home to be with Him.

The apostle Paul offers this last bit of confidence for our comfort: *The Lord will rescue me from all the evil that is done and will save me and take me to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever. Amen.*

When you look back at Paul's ministry, you will notice a consistent theme: Paul was constantly under attack. Mobs, beatings, the threat of arrest, stonings, etc. . . The devil was out to get Paul. He wanted to destroy him and more than once Paul was almost as good as dead. But through it all the LORD rescued him. The LORD pulled him out at just the right moment. Sure, it is true it was God's will for Paul to suffer for the sake of the Gospel, but the LORD would not allow Paul to be lost. He would save Paul and bring him home to heaven – just as He promised.

The promise Paul placed so much confidence in was not just meant for him. It was given to us as well. Throughout our lives the LORD has been with us. He has rescued us from every evil we have faced thus far. Now, please understand what this means. It does not mean that the LORD never allows very bad things in our lives. In His gracious wisdom, the LORD may allow severe hardships to come our way, just as He did for Paul. The LORD never promised Christians an easy life. What He does promise is to give us the strength we need to sustain our faith in the midst of these severe trials. He also promises is that our trials will come to an end. He has his hand on us and He will not allow the trial we face to sweep us away from him. As we hold on to him in faith, He promises that He will pull us out from every evil that threatens our soul.

And not only will the LORD pull us out, He will also make sure to carry us in his arms and lead us home to heaven. Do you want proof that God will do this for us? Then look at what the LORD did for Paul and take comfort from his example.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Listen to Paul's final encouragement to Timothy and us: **Keep the faith.** *In times of trouble and disappointment, know that the LORD is with you – carrying you home to be with Him.* Amen.