

## Sermon Outline

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle Lesson of Saint Paul's First letter to Timothy, chapter three verses one through thirteen.

Boys and Girls, how are you this morning? How many of you enjoy playing board games? When I was a kid, my family played lots of board games. I think how we played games taught me a way to approach lists of rules and regulations. Normally, we read the rules at the beginning of the game, we usually didn't attend to them until something was wrong. Something had to be at stake before we would consult the rules. So I would be playing an 80-point word in Scrabble and my brother would pull out the rule book to determine whether you could play a foreign word or a slang word or an unusual (but legitimate!) spelling. Because of this, I began to see rules and regulations as the things you turn to when you are in the midst of an argument. People have chosen sides—for or against—and the rules will be used to arbitrate the dispute. Rules rule. And those who can make their case on the basis of the rules will win the game.

Sometimes, that is how we approach this section from Paul's letter to Timothy. Paul is offering Timothy a description of the qualities that should be possessed by pastors and deacons. How easy it would be to read through this list and do a mental evaluation of your pastor and determine whether he should be in or out. If things are tough, if congregational life is not going the way you desire, how easy it would be to turn to 1 Timothy 3 and begin to make an argument either for or against your pastor.

While there certainly are situations where such things need to be attended to, and this list of qualifications certainly can prevent a person from entering the ministry or remove a person from it, that is not the only function for this list of qualifications. This morning, I would like to consider this list of

qualifications as you would a list of rules at the *beginning* of a game . . . before fights have started, before feelings have been hurt, before something has happened that needs to be judged. I would like to consider this list of qualities as a picture of the kind of community that a church will become. When a church has leaders like this, what does it look like? What is it like to live in such a community? In this list of qualifications, God Offers Us a Helpful Vision of the Ministry and of life in the community of faith. Ponder this statement and those questions as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

## **I. God offers us a vision of a community that works for others.**

A. Text and Liturgical Context: In our readings this morning, we have a contrast of two kinds of community—one that is wayward and one that follows the way of the Lord.

1. The wayward communities are concerned only about themselves. They seek after their own wants and their own desires above all else.

a. In Amos, they have surrounded themselves with beautiful music and luxurious furnishings to celebrate their faith. Even though there is grave injustice in the world, they close their doors to the world and celebrate being at “ease in Zion.” They are safe. They are secure. They do not need to worry about anyone else’s problems or hardships. For a modern example, just look at what happened this past week in Martha’s Vineyard. People at ease and how they have treated those who do not have that ease.

b. In Jesus’ parable in Luke, the rich man reclines at a feast while God has placed the poor man at his door. The rich man’s self-indulgence blinds him to an opportunity for charity. It is more important to care for himself than others. He has the best food, the best wine, the best clothing, and

servants. He highly enjoys them, all while the poor watch on begging for food.

2. In his First Letter to Timothy, Paul offers a different vision for the Church in Ephesus (vv 1–3): In a community that follows the way of the Lord, the leader of that community will not be a lover of money, not be drawn to excess, but live in moderation and conduct himself with self-control. Rather than put himself or his concerns forward, he will control his concerns for himself and cultivate his concern for others. As Paul notes, he will be hospitable, caring for God’s Church, and have a good reputation among those outside the faith. He will be an example to the church of service and show the Church the love of Christ.

## B. Application

1. The difference between the two communities is the difference between a life of self-service and a life of self-sacrifice. Communities can focus on their needs and attend to their own desires or they can focus on their Lord and his desire for the Church. It is easy for us to get focused inward on ourselves, to focus on only what we want and need rather than the needs of others.
2. Yet, look at the example of Christ! Jesus focuses not on His own interests but on our interests. Christ created his Church through his act of self-sacrificial love. Although he had no sin, he bore the punishment for sin on our behalf on the Cross that we might become children of God.
  - a. By His death and resurrection, Jesus forgives our selfish struggle to care for ourselves and reveals that not only are we cared for by God but we are also gifted by God to care for others. That is why God gives us blessings, not to hoard them for ourselves but to use them for the needs of our

neighbor.

- b. To this end, Our Lord raises among us pastors, who control concerns for the self and cultivate concerns for others, to lead us into acts of self-sacrificial love.
3. Example: In some major cities, there have been churches that form partnerships in the Gospel. A wealthy suburban church forms a partnership with an under-resourced urban congregation, working together for the good of the Kingdom. Just as we do with Peace, Christ Deaf, and First. We work together in love.
  - a. Rather than living “at ease in Zion,” congregations are drawn to sharing the life of Christ with others.
  - b. God’s vision for his church leaders and for his churches is that they be communities of self-sacrifice that work for others.

## **II. God offers us a vision of a community that grows through care and gracious conversation.**

- A. Text: Almost at the center of Paul’s list of qualities is the ability to teach (v 2). This is a quality that has been a focus for many years by many Pastors and Congregations.
  1. God desires that his communities of faith be led by pastors who are able to teach. False teaching was a problem for the Church in Ephesus. Paul warns Timothy several times about false teachers (1:3–7; 6:3–5) and offers clear directions on how to teach (4:6–16).
  2. What is interesting here, however, is how the ability to teach is listed among and related to other qualities that the pastor should possess (vv 2–3).
    - a. Teaching does not happen in a vacuum. In fact, teaching is best done in relation to the life of the teacher.
    - b. When Jesus calls his disciples, he calls them not only to

listen to him but also to follow him and to learn from him by participating in his ministry.

3. Example: On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus began the Passover celebration by washing his disciples' feet.
  - a. After such humble and even humiliating service, Jesus asks his disciples, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:12–14).
4. The life experience that lies at the very heart of Christian teaching is that of salvation.
  - a. As Paul relates to Timothy earlier in the letter, "Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1:13–15).
  - b. Through God's gracious work—forgiving sin and granting salvation—he prepares pastors to teach. They share with others this word of grace that saves.

## B. Application

1. Our cultural context is filled with contention and strife.
  - a. Social media celebrates those who are fierce warriors for their beliefs so long as you believe the right thing.
  - b. A loving conversation is no longer trusted to bring about change. Instead, social protest prepares the way for legislation so that one knows just how passionately people hold their beliefs before they use the legal system to enforce them.
  - c. Words are for war and triumph, not dialogue, care, and

- mutual support.
2. For Christians, however, the war is not on social media. God's war is on sin and Satan.
    - a. God delivers people through Christ, who suffered the punishment of sin on the cross and rose from the grave to reveal his triumph over death and the devil.
    - b. This victory is shared by messengers who are themselves recipients of grace and who speak in love (not anger) toward others.
  3. Paul's words then still apply to pastors and the people they lead today.
    - a. Paul encourages Timothy to find pastors who are not bullies as they relate to others. Theology can indeed become a tense discussion. It has to be because people's eternal lives are at stake. But being quarrelsome or arrogant or belligerent toward others for the sake of scriptural truth is not Paul's picture of the pastor.
    - b. Rather, Paul encourages pastors to teach with a gentle spirit, so that the pastor is "above reproach" and people do not dismiss the message because of the messenger.
  4. At the heart of the world, filled with injustice and violence, is God's Church and, at the heart of the Church, in word and in deed, is our gracious Lord and his work of salvation. Faithful conversation in our world is difficult, but Paul encourages pastors to be above reproach, respectable, gentle, not quarrelsome, creating communities that grow through care and gracious conversation.

*Conclusion:* Scholars have reflected on Paul's list of qualifications for pastors. Often, they have noted that lists like this are common for positions of leadership in the ancient world. This insight makes it seem as though Paul was just taking the lists used by others and applying

them to the Church. If that were the case, then different cultures and different time periods would produce different lists. The qualities important for a pastor in twenty-first-century America would be different than the qualities important for a pastor in twenty-first-century Africa or sixteenth-century Germany.

Another way of viewing this list, however, is to see how it grows out of the love of God in Christ. In Jesus Christ, the eternal Word became living flesh and dwelt among us. God entered into a saving human relationship with us. God began his good work relationally and, in the Church, God continues to work through human relationships. He leads not only through words but also through life. God offers a list of qualities for pastors so that he can work through them to form congregations that work for the good of others and grow through care and gracious conversation.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.