

"The Boundless Word"  
2 Timothy 2:8-13

October 13, 2019

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Do you ever feel discouraged as a Christian, given the world in which we live today? It is difficult to be a Christian these days. The world around us, which once respected the Christian faith, now vehemently opposes it. The world, which once accepted the Word of God, at least superficially, now attempts to silence it. The popular culture, which once included religious and biblical references, now seeks to purge itself of all religious references, especially Christian ones. It's easy to want to just give up on following Jesus Christ which some have done by succumbing to the worldly influences around them.

Lest we think that this is only a modern-day problem, just take a look at our epistle reading for today. Paul, the apostle, is quite discouraged and who would blame him for feeling that way? He was sitting in prison, which was quite ironic. The former persecutor of the church who had arrested, tortured, and imprisoned Christians for following Christ was himself arrested, tortured, and imprisoned for preaching Christ. However, it was not just that he was imprisoned, but what kind of incarceration it was.

You see, this was not the first time Paul had been in jail. The last time he was in jail, he was under house arrest in Rome and lived quite a comfortable life. He was able to come and go as he pleased (as long as his Roman guard was with him) and could receive visitors anytime he wished. As far as jail goes, this was not too bad of an experience.

His situation in our text for today is much different. Having been arrested by Emperor Nero for preaching Christ, an illegal religion in the Roman Empire at the time, Paul found himself in a dark dank dungeon, chained to the brick walls. He was literally chained to death. He was unable to do anything about it. He could not escape and he would not be found innocent. Although he was released alive the last time he was in prison, this would be much different. This imprisonment in which Paul found himself would end in death by decapitation (something he probably already knew).

In addition to this, he was lonely. He was all alone. Enemies and false brothers had deserted him, something which is always frustrating and discouraging. His friends were gone and preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout Israel, Asia, and Europe. According to this letter, only Luke, his trusted and dear friend, was with him.

We can become discouraged and want to give up just like Paul. Sure, we are not physically chained to a dungeon wall for our faith and the exercise of that faith. However, that is something which could be on the way for Christians in this country as it has been for Christians in other countries. Christians throughout the world are paying for their faiths with their lives. How would you feel if you were thrown in jail for expressing faith in Jesus Christ?

However, we may feel that the government and other agencies of authority are metaphorically jailing us by seeking to shut us up. A subtle, yet important change has been made in the way in which "freedom of religion" is discussed, understood, and

enforced. In many places, the term, “freedom of religion” is replaced by the phrase “freedom of worship.” While this may seem to be the same thing, it is not the same at all. By using the latter phrase, those in authority wish to grant Christians the freedom to do whatever they want to do in their church building and in their worship services.” However, Christians are not expected to live their religion outside of the church in the world.

According to this way of thinking, Christians may think or believe whatever they wish about controversial subjects such as homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion, euthanasia, immigration, and so on. However, we are not permitted (some would say) to attempt to make their position on these various topics part of public law through voting or running for office. Our opinions are to remain chained to the walls of our church.

Yet it is not simply freedom to believe our faith and to live our faith that is being lost. Great sums of money are being lost in lawsuits brought by people against those who, according to their conscience and their faith may not participate in such things as same-sex weddings, transgendered marriages, and so on.

Even reputations are being damaged and destroyed when society laughs at us for our antiquated views and makes fun of us for having them. We become the butt of many jokes, the target of people’s anger, and the object of much ridicule.

We may be feel exactly as St. Paul did, even though we are not sitting in a prison cell. Yet we are lonely. Those who oppose us desert us. Our friends may abandon us. Although we’re not in any type of prison made with bricks and mortar, we may feel like we are in a prison of the mind. We are chained to our sin and that leads to death.

People react to this in different ways. Some, who just want to “get along”, will give in to secular positions today on topics such as evolution, sexual morals, life issues, and so on with the hope of getting out of their metaphorical prison and experience freedom. Some will abandon the Christian faith altogether with the hope that those outside the church will like them. Rarely, it seems, that these attempts of compromise with the world or abandonment of the Christian faith help us at all. Mainline denominations who attempted this find no growth or improvement. We just end up forgetting about Jesus.

Yet Paul does not give up nor does it appear that he becomes discouraged. He doesn’t complain about his present circumstances. He doesn’t dream about improved earthly circumstances. He doesn’t attempt to just block it all out and forget everything. Instead, he chooses to remember the right thing – that which will comfort him now and give hope for the future. He says, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.”

The person and work of Jesus Christ is what redeems this horrible situation and sanctifies any hope for the future. Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world in order to fix the conflict of sin which exists between God and humanity and from which all other conflicts flow. He came to our jail of sin and death and unchained us. By His sacrificial death on the cross in our place, He has detached us from sin and set us free from death..

However, the most important thing is that Jesus Christ is “risen from the dead.” He has already defeated the devil and all of his attempts to frighten us and discourages us by the threat of death. By His resurrection from the dead, He guarantees us the resurrection of our own body which will result in life everlasting. He has opened the door of our jail cell of death for us to walk through into life everlasting. That cannot be changed, nor can it be taken away from us.

Our present situation, like St. Paul’s situation, may seem bleak. Paul says of his Gospel – his Good News - that he is “suffering, bound with chains as a criminal” for it. He looks and appears to be very weak. We, too, may be suffering for the Gospel in some minor ways compared with Paul’s. We, too, may look and appear very weak. Although we may be bound and restricted, persecuted and suffering, and even dying, there is one thing that is powerful and is not bound nor can it be restricted. It is the Word of God.

The Word of God is more than words and more than a message. The Word of God is power. As we sang in our opening hymn today, “Thy strong word did cleave the darkness; At Thy speaking it was done.” The Word of God does more than inform. It accomplishes. The Word of God created the universe – the earth, the heavens, and everything in them. The Word of God says what it does and does what it says.

The Word of God works in the spiritual realm, as well. The Word of God does more than inform. It accomplishes things. The Word of God does more than tell us the story of salvation. It brings to us the fruits of that salvation. As the hymn said, “Thy strong word bespeaks us righteous, Bright with Thine own holiness.” As God calls things into being by speaking His Word at creation, so God has called us into holiness into being by speaking His Word at our baptism.

The Word of God is able to do more than describe peace and explain encouragement. It has the ability to bring those to us. When we have that Word of God, read that Word privately in our homes, hear that Word of God as we gather together for Divine Service, and then stay (everyone, not merely the elite) to study that Word together, we need never be discouraged. We will be forgiven, strengthened, encouraged, and blessed when we take advantage of the restricted Word of God which has not been bound, is not bound, and never will be bound.

Of course, this does not mean that the circumstances in our lives necessarily improve or get better. Being unchained from sin, death and, hell does not mean that we are unchained from the consequences of those things as we live in a fallen world. Look at St. Paul. He moved from living in a prison cell to dying by the sword of the Roman government. Yet, he still has hope and still has encouragement.

We have those, as well. You may be suffering any number of things. Some are because you live in a sinful world. Some, like Paul, because you follow Christ. How are you to live in this way? Paul says to young Timothy and to us, “You, then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in the suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

We are to be strengthened (literally, empowered” by the grace that is connected with Christ Jesus. We are strengthened and empowered by the Word of God to live

our lives as Christians here and now. We are not to avoid suffering (which will come if we are faithful), as if it were bad. We are not to reluctantly engage in suffering because it is something “good for you.” Rather, we are to endure suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

As Paul was entrusted with the Good News of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus, he is entrusting that message and that power to young Timothy and to all who would follow after him. Since Paul knew that the Word of God was powerful, was bringing life and salvation, and could never be bound in the past, in the present, or in the future, he says, “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

We do not suffer for ourselves, nor do we avoid suffering for ourselves, either. We endure all suffering for the sake of those coming after us – the elect – so that they might hear the unbound Word of God and obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

It is interesting how people view the Bible today. To some, it is a religious text, full of moral teaching. To others, the Bible is a pack of lies, myths, and insensitive stories designed to enslave people and hurt them. Even those who view the Scriptures in an honored and respected way think of the Bible as religious stories and rules. However, this is much too weak of a view of the Bible. It says of itself, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) The Word of God is living and active, not a dusty old religious text. It is a powerful weapon for dividing between sin and Law and holiness and the Gospel. It can condemn and kill us. It can exonerate us and give us life. Therefore, do not be afraid of being chained to sin, bound to death, sent to hell. The Word of God is not bound, nor chained to anything. It has released you from sin, freed you for life, and brings you to everlasting life in Christ Jesus, our Lord, the Word made flesh who dwells among us even now. Amen