

**Poured Out**

October 23, 2022

**Joel 2:23-32**

<sup>23</sup> O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before. <sup>24</sup> The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. <sup>25</sup> I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you.

<sup>26</sup> You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

<sup>27</sup> You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

<sup>28</sup> Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

<sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. <sup>30</sup> I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. <sup>32</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:6-8 and 16-18**

<sup>6</sup> As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

<sup>8</sup>From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing... <sup>16</sup>At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.



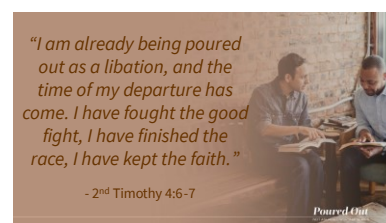
As we conclude our worship series this week, we will focus on giving our all. Today is about living as Jesus describes living in John 10:10: *“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* This is what God through the prophet Joel speaks of too. This is also the example set by Paul as he sought to live full-out for the gospel, embracing all of life – the good and the bad – all for the sake of Christ, giving his all for the glory of God. Living an abundant life, living a life not ashamed of the gospel that has the power to save, we too can be change agents. Doing so, we will challenge the status quo; we will work for justice and equality; we will threaten those who enjoy power and privilege. An abundant life, lived poured out for God and for others, will draw attention. It will at times draw adversity and perhaps even persecution. Yet even here we can find abundant life, for Christ walks with us through all of life. As we prepare to explore being poured out for God, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Turn first with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4, beginning in verse 6. Here Paul begins with these words: *“As for me.”* Here we are privy to a personal moment.

This is a moment between Timothy and Paul and between Paul and God. We are blessed because we too get to share in this moment. Here is a lesson to learn and a life to consider, maybe even a life to model our own faith after. In these words some hear a challenge, some hear an invitation. However received, all hear a call to live a life worthy of the gospel. In these words a door is opened to us. As we are challenged or invited, depending on your perspective, to live this all-or-nothing life of faith, we are reminded too that the one who opens the door promises to be with us to the very end.

So, when was the last time you spent yourself for another or for a just cause? Maybe it was in a physical effort. You did something for another that required much of you, and you were physically drained at the end of your time of service. Maybe it was an emotional giving? You spent time with a friend in need and felt absolutely drained after being there for them. Or maybe it was a great spiritual effort? You prayed and prayed and prayed. By the time you said "amen" you felt like you had left it all on the floor before the throne of God. These are but a few of the ways that God invites us and challenges us to be poured out as we build community and the kingdom of God.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul shares these words with Timothy and with us: *"I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

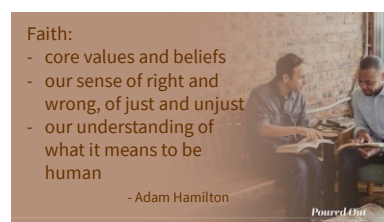


Paul chooses these first words with great intention. “Libation” is not a word we use often. In the original Greek it meant “to be put to death, to have one’s life blood poured out.” It means to give ones’ all. It means to withhold nothing in our service to God.

In the Jewish tradition that Paul and Timothy grew up in and around, a libation was a liquid sacrifice. It commonly was given alongside a grain or meat sacrifice. Olive oil would be the most common libation. In today's passage, it would not be too much to speak of the blood, sweat, and tears poured out by Paul as an offering to God. He speaks to Timothy and to us of a total commitment, calling forth the giving of our whole self.

Acknowledging that his death is now imminent, Paul reflects back on his journey of faith and shares that he has *"fought the good fight... finished the race... kept the faith."* Paul begins with fighting the good fight. This is not a physical fight. It is a spiritual battle, an emotional battle, a battle for what is just and good and righteous. In our contemporary world this kind of a fight was fought by men like Martin Luther King, Jr., like Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, like John Lewis. These men gave their all fighting for equality and basic human rights. King and Tutu and Mandela fought for civil rights for human rights and to end apartheid, respectively. Lewis was a congressman who used his place in office to be a champion for civil rights too. He is known for stirring up what he himself termed "good trouble." His was a call to get into trouble for the right purposes, to bring about the right change. For King, for Tutu, for Lewis, for Paul, and for Jesus, the good fight was fought to bring justice, to bring redemption, to lead to transformation, to bring about a better world.

Last Sunday in our discipleship small group our topic was faith and politics. Adam Hamilton defined faith as "core values and beliefs, our sense of right and wrong, just and unjust, and our understanding of what it means to be human."



Much of the class and our discussion centered on ideas of what is right and just. People like King and Mandela and Lewis fought for equality and to end racism and prejudice. To me, and probably to most of you here and to most of you joining us online, inequality and racism and prejudice are unjust and wrong. These work against what it means to be fully human. These are realities that can almost universally be seen in terms of black and white. But, as Sue pointed out Sunday evening, most of our world and the challenges and issues we face are not so black and white. My sense of what is right may differ from yours in some cases. Your sense of what is just might not be exactly what my thoughts on what is just. Most issues in our world are in the gray. Both “sides” have truths to what they believe or understand. As people of faith our call is to engage in the conversation, to learn what all have to offer, to seek to understand. Doing so, we apply our faith to all aspects of the process. We ask what Jesus would do or have to say about this issue. We ask the Holy Spirit for guidance and discernment and understanding. We allow faith to be the thing that influences and leads all areas of our lives. Doing so we will keep the faith foremost as we journey with Christ.

Paul’s faith influenced all he said and did. Because of this choice, he kept the faith and finished the race. What do you suppose it means to keep the faith? Does it mean that we keep it to ourselves, tucked away into some private corner of our lives? Certainly not! Jesus calls us to live out our faith in all areas of our lives. This is a call to ever keep the faith before us. To keep the faith means that we measure our life and our decisions against the example set by Jesus. That begins by living out our faith every day. That means we keep the faith when the choices get hard. That means we keep the faith when we are challenged by divisiveness or hatred or prejudice or injustice.

Keeping the faith means that we don't set it aside because that's the more convenient or easier choice. That means that we sacrifice security and comfort and privilege in order to be poured out for God and for others. Paul, facing the end of his earthly life, boldly declared that he has kept the faith. Doing so, he has finished the race laid out for him by God.

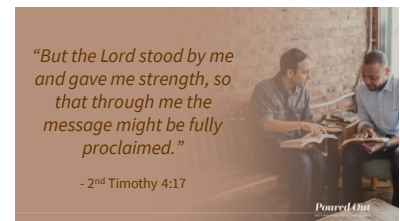


We too can keep the faith and finish the race. We do so by listening to and leaning into the words of Jesus. We do so by keeping the faith even when others are swayed by the something less than faith in Jesus. We do so by relying on and trusting in Jesus. We do so by standing on our faith. We do not have itchy ears because we know the only one who is the way, the truth, and the life. When we keep the faith and live faithfully, we too shall one day claim *“the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day.”* This hope that Paul claims in verse 8 is our hope too.

To hope in the Lord is nothing new. Turn with me to Joel 2 for a reminder of God's faithfulness. The context of this passage is God's promise of restoration for the nation of Israel. They have sinned and been forced into exile. The locusts – mighty Babylon's soldiers – came and destroyed and swept the people away. Yet the “locusts” were but a moment in time. Here in Joel 2, God promises to vindicate the chosen people. God promises that one day the rains will again fall, and the earth will yield in abundance. The land will overflow with grain, wine, and olive oil. Verses 23-27 are about the physical abundance and blessings that God will provide to the nation of Israel.

Turning to verses 28-32, the abundance and blessing becomes about the spiritual rain that God desires to pour out into the Israelite's lives - blessing them with visions and dreams, with deliverance and salvation - as they receive the Spirit's leading and guiding.

This is a promise given that applies to our lives as well. We are blessed by the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit as we strive to live faithfully each day. This is what Paul speaks of in verses 16-18. Returning to 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4, in verse 16 we see that, at first, Paul felt abandoned. When he was arrested, no one came to his defense. In their defense, they probably feared for their lives. Continuing in verse 17 we read, *"But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed."* As Paul turned to Jesus, he found that Jesus was already right there. Leaning in, he found a renewed strength to continue the work, to continue to proclaim the good news to the world. Jesus offers this to you and to me as well. When we are willing to fight the good fight, to walk the path of discipleship, Jesus will be there with us, giving us strength and comfort and guidance as we need these things. Paul was willing to reach out to the Lord, to seek help from the Lord. He was humble enough to know that he could not give his life as an all-out commitment purely in his own effort. Paul knew he had to have Jesus standing right there by him.



It can be hard to ask for help, to admit that we cannot do it on our own. It can be easier to just look like we're doing ok, to look like we have it all together. In our gospel reading this week, we find two characters, each with something to offer each of us.



In Luke 18, verses 9-14, we find the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee. These men are two human beings coming into the presence of God to offer their prayers. They are equally sinful in God's eyes, as we all are.

In the context of today's main passage, one was like Paul and the other was not. One man stands on his own, offering the wrong kind of gratitude. The Pharisee is not seeking to pour himself out before God. He is seeking to fill himself by ticking off all that he does to appear faithful. The Pharisee sought the approval of man - wanting others to see his "goodness" and to pour into him by recognizing how good and holy he was.

I too can get caught in the trap of doing or saying the right thing for the wrong reason. My audience can be here instead of in heaven. Then I do not go home justified before God either. Then it is about me instead of about bringing God the glory. I believe that we can all fall into this trap. We say, "I go to church most every Sunday. I give each week when they take the offering. I do this and this and this. Clearly, I am a person of deep faith." The Pharisee lives with an eye towards surpassing the public piety of all his neighbors. "And thank God I'm not like that guy over there," the Pharisee says.

That guy over there, the other man, the tax collector, he pours himself out fully before God. He begs for mercy. For a long time he thought that money would fill him. Finding himself empty and in a desperate place, the tax collector begs for mercy. He longs for God to fill his life. Humbled by seeing who and what he was, the tax collector realizes his deep and profound need for God. The tax collector exhibits the humility and honesty that we all need to stand before the Lord.

The tax collector sets his eye on God alone, giving his life to God, trusting that God alone can save him. This same faith is the faith that Joel offered to the people living in *"a day of darkness."* The Israelites were living with fear and trembling, exiled in a foreign land. But the prophet Joel reminds them that God is faithful, that God will redeem and restore them one day. There is an invitation to call on name of Lord, to be *"rescued from the lion's mouth,"* to use Paul's words.

Returning to Paul's writing, he declares with hope and with faith, *"The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom."* He is sure of his future in



Christ. He has always and will always continue to trust Jesus to be by his side. The rescue is not necessarily from suffering or hardship. Paul's life lies scattered with lots of suffering and hardship. The rescue is found in the relationship, in our place in the kingdom of God. The rescue is found the person of Jesus – in the one who never wavers, who never leaves us, in the one who claims us as his own as we claim Christ as our own.

A question to wrestle with as we draw to a close of this time together is this: Can we, like Paul when in prison, live an abundant and blessed life, even in the midst of a trial or hardship? I believe we can. I believe we should. The key is that we, like Paul, are willing to be poured out, to give our all for Christ. Remaining faithful and trusting in God during the storms of life is a powerful witness to a world in need of healing and wholeness and restoration.



It is one way that we can tell those itching ears that God is in control, that God loves us in spite of our hardship, that God never leaves us.

The rescue and redemption and restoration that Jesus offers is found when we pour ourselves out like a libation. We find who and whose we are when we spend ourselves in the name of Christ. When we are poured out, the glory is given to the one who poured out his life as a ransom for many. There we find joyful and abundant life – life to the full. There, like Paul, we can declare, *“To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”* May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

### **GPS - Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. For whom (or for what good fight) are you drawn to "pour out your life" – in order to lift up someone or to create good change?
- 2) *Pray*. Where are you tempted to set aside or hide your faith because that's the easier choice? Pray for the Spirit to strengthen you.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 18:18-30. What thing or two would you struggle to give up for a better relationship with Jesus? What would be a first step in giving this up?