

Present Yourself to God

October 9, 2022

2nd Timothy 2:8-15

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David — that is my gospel, ⁹ for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. ¹¹ The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself.

¹⁴ Remind them of this and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

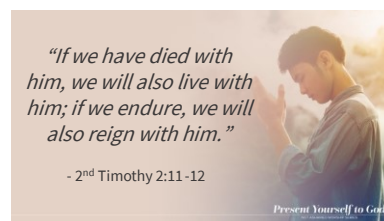
¹⁷ Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?”¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”



Last Sunday we began a new series as we shared a message called “Rekindle the Gift.” Part of the call last week was to do just that – to fan into flame the gift of faith that you received when you made the good confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We recalled those who poured into us, like Lois and Eunice and Paul did into Timothy’s life, and we asked to be grateful for their efforts in our lives. We were also challenged to be people who pour into others. That was what GPS questions 2 and 3 were all about. As we prepare to consider how we present ourselves to God today, would anyone be willing to share how you poured into another this past week?... For me it was simply being intentional in choosing to walk alongside and minister to a couple of different people during a challenging time in their lives. As we prepare to look at how God calls us to both inward and outward expressions of faith, let us pray...

In today’s primary text from 2nd Timothy 2 there are two dimensions to consider. The inward and outward is probably the best way to describe these two calls or charges. Last Sunday as we shared in holy communion, it was a way of expressing our inner, personal commitment to God. The practice of communion begins with a reflection of the state of our souls, often followed by confession and repentance. Communion calls us to an honest look within as we present ourselves to God. Creeds, corporate prayers, and songs of worship are also ways we communally present ourselves to God.

Turning to our passage from 2nd Timothy 2 we find what amounts to a personal creed or a statement of faith from Paul. He names who Jesus is to him: *“raised from the dead, a descendent of David.”* He names what Jesus brings: *“salvation... eternal glory.”* He names some of the promises of the faith: *“we will also live with him... we will also reign with him.”* It is interesting that each of these are preceded with an “if” statement. For Paul and for Timothy, the “if” has already happened. For most of us, the “if” has happened too. But for those who have yet come to a saving faith, these are the promises that Jesus offers, the promises that we can share with those we meet who are seeking. The text reads and the promises are these: *“If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.”* Paul has claimed these promises. Most of us have claimed these promises too.



Paul also names a struggle. Namely, the reality that at times we deny Jesus and at times we are faithless. In Paul's theology there is room for moments of doubt, for times of failure of will: *“if we deny him... if we are faithless,”* he writes. This is an honest admission from Paul. It is an admission that we must make too. To acknowledge our faults and shortcomings and sins is an essential part of presenting ourselves to God. To bow our heads and to come to God honestly and openly is an important part of practicing our faith. It helps to keep us in right relationship with God. Then Paul closes his creedal statement with hope: *“He remains faithful.”* Jesus does not waiver, he does not falter. His love for us is a no-matter-what love.



Paul has chosen to give his whole life to Jesus, to live his whole life upon the foundation of these beliefs. Paul has chosen to give his all to this person that is with him in every hardship, to this person that is with him as he sits in chains. In the person of Christ and in the relationship that Paul has with Jesus, he has invested his all – his reason for being, his identity, his purpose. Through this relationship Paul knows freedom even though he is a prisoner in chains. Because of his faith Paul lives with hope and without fear. The questions here for us are these: Is our faith as sure as Paul's? Do we live with this same freedom in Christ? Is our faith in Jesus Christ a no-matter-what faith? No matter the grief, no matter the doubt, no matter the suffering, no matter the fear?

In these words that we find in verses 8-13, Paul is both rehearsing his own creedal statement, one that he has proclaimed with all of his life, and he is presenting this gospel statement to Timothy. These words are, of course, for you and for me as well. Paul reminds us of the good news, the promises of salvation and abundant life, and of our reality that we live as fallen creatures at least some of the time. He also gives us hope in these moments of faithlessness. Jesus remains faithful. When we regain our stride and walk once again in faith, Jesus is right there by our side, walking through all of life with us. We know, as Paul did, that the struggles, that the “ifs” will surely come. It is our reality. Paul lived this reality too. His life, as does ours, bears witness to the ongoing and constant presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus is always there to encourage and to sustain us, even, and maybe especially, in the midst of trials and hardships. These are the promises, the gifts that Jesus offers when we too choose to walk in relationship with Christ. It is a choice that we are free to make, or free not to make.

You see, Jesus will not rescue us from this broken world all on his own. We cannot be passive spectators to the healing and redemptive power of Jesus Christ. We must choose to invest in the path of discipleship, in the process of growing and becoming more like Christ. On this path, Christ calls us to lean in and to declare our faith in the ways that we live our lives. Christ invites us to be unafraid and to take risks in living our faith out loud in the world. Just as Christ is present when we need redeemed and restored, he is present in the process of making us more and more into his image. The Holy Spirit, Christ's living presence in each of us, works to transform us as we surrender to that power at work in us.

While this sanctifying grace is wonderful for us, as we learned last Sunday night in our discipleship class, it is not simply for our own benefit. Growing in Christ is not an end in itself. We are being made into a disciple of Christ for a purpose. That purpose is to make other disciples of Christ. Like Paul, our ongoing relationship with Jesus provides fuel for our witness as we seek to share our faith with others. Paul says to Timothy, "Do your best." The text says the same thing to us: *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth."* As we live faithfully, sharing our faith with the world, we will work as one indwelt by the Spirit and therefore filled with the words of truth given by the same Spirit.

As we shift to our gospel text for this morning, let us preface it by thinking through what allowed Paul to fight the good fight of faith, to mentor Timothy even as he found himself a prisoner in chains. What allowed Paul to present himself as



one approved by God? I believe that Paul witnessed in spite of his circumstances because he had what I call “an attitude of gratitude.” Paul was genuinely thankful for all that Jesus had done and was doing in his life. He was grateful for the radical change that Christ has worked in his life, transforming him from a violent, hate-filled man to a man of compassion and love. Encouraging and mentoring Timothy was one of Paul’s means of expressing his gratitude for his relationship with Christ.

Turning to Luke 17 we find the parable of the 10 lepers beginning in verse 11. This is a familiar story. Presenting themselves to God in the flesh, these 10 lepers cry out to Jesus, saying, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”* In reality, they are asking Jesus to express mercy by healing them. These outcasts long to be healed so that they can be restored to community, to a place of belonging. Following Jesus’ instructions to *“go and show yourselves to the priests,”* they are healed on the way to the synagogue. But only one turns back to thank Jesus for what he has done. Only the Samaritan *“turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.”*

Hearing this parable, I believe that most of us like to think that we’d be like this one Samaritan who goes back to Jesus, who presents himself as one grateful for what Jesus has done in his life.

But for me, and maybe for some of you, the truth is that we do not live our faith out in such bold and powerful ways. We don't publicly express, with a loud voice, our gratitude for all that Jesus has done and is doing in our lives. Perhaps because we don't live our faith out loud like this Samaritan did, then maybe you, like me, don't always come on Sunday expecting something amazing to happen. And maybe you, like many, don't get all worked up when you read your Bible. As we continue to lean into the idea of rekindling the gift of God within us, maybe we need to be a bit more like this Samaritan.

The Samaritan would have been an outsider – both by the nature of his disease and by his place among the Jewish people. But once he met Jesus, he went from outsider to insider, from one who did not know faith to one filled with faith, from one who had no hope to one overflowing with hope. What would this look like in our lives? I think it might translate to one who sings a little louder in church, to one who volunteers a little more in their community, to one who reads their Bible like a starving man attacks a buffet table. That might sound like a lot. But most of us are a lot like the Samaritan. We've been touched by Jesus. We have a great story to tell. The Samaritan did not know everything there was to know about Jesus or about faith. But he did know Jesus and he knew the power of Jesus to heal and restore him to abundant life. Is that the Jesus you know? Is that the Jesus who has touched your life again and again? My friends, we too have been saved, we too know Jesus' redeeming and healing love. The question is, how do we present our gratitude to God and to others?



It begins with living our faith out loud, by letting the evidence of our joy and salvation show in how we act, in what we value, in how we treat others, and in how we respond to all that life brings – both the good and the bad. It continues by allowing our best self to shine forth from within, overflowing with God’s love and grace and mercy. Shining forth, we present ourselves to God by loving and caring for and ministering to those who God places in our path and in our life. Encountering each person, may we present ourselves to God as ones willing to let every word that falls from our lips to be words of praise and thanksgiving and invitation, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all we meet. May we allow God’s never-ending love and glorifying grace to transform us day by day as we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. May we shine brightly this week, drawing others to our hope and promise, Jesus Christ. Amen and amen.

GPS - Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Which is the easier way to express your faith – inwardly or outwardly? As a way to grow in your discipleship, how can you grow in the one that is harder?
- 2) *Pray*. How can you, like the Samaritan in Luke 17, praise God in a loud voice, prostrating yourself at Jesus’ feet? Seek guidance and strength in prayer!
- 3) *Study*. Read 2nd Timothy 2:22-26. When do you struggle with divisiveness or with quarreling? How does this passage help you to escape “the traps of the devil?”