



Sermon Series: “Can 2 Timothy Edify Us?”
“Looking Back”

Preaching Text: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
27 October 2013: 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
FUMC of Arlington, Texas 76011

If the Pastoral Epistles were intended as leadership manuals for ministers in the early church, as Wayne Meeks suggests (*The Writings of St. Paul*, W. W. Norton & Company; 2nd edition, 2007), then the fourth chapter of 2 Timothy offers a persuasive lesson on the nature of ministry amid conflict. The tone of this chapter is more personal and passionate than any other section in the Pastoral Letters Paul seems to cry out both in pain of rejection and in celebrating a great run. This text offers awareness into the emotion that accompanies reflection near the end of one’s life and faithfulness. The nostalgic quality of Paul’s words gives the passage great usefulness for believers on many levels.

Next Sunday is All Saint’s Day and I don’t think any of us are ever truly ready to say good-bye to a loved one. No matter how death happens, whether suddenly as in an accident, or slowly with the advent of an illness coming on gradually over time, we wish we could have held onto our loved one just a little bit longer. Even when we see death as a friend who brings an end to pain and suffering, there is still something in us that wishes it had all been a bad dream. We all wish we could go back the way it should be and that life should seem normal again—normal, of course, means without death. Yet as Norman Cousins once wrote: “Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.”

Of course we cannot go back as this is not realistic or possible. Rather, we must go on. This going on is not only unavoidable but it is the response of faith. When Jesus died he left the responsibilities for the gospel to his disciples. He also sent them the Spirit to be their advocate, counselor, and encourager. Thus, the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular instruct us on how we can say good-bye and say good-bye with faith. Our brief lesson for this morning is part of Paul’s correspondence



to Timothy. As Paul told the Ephesian elders good-bye at Miletus, Paul in this scripture lesson, tells Timothy that his time is drawing to a close. Hear our lesson for the day, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18:

6 As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 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

16 At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! 17 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. 18 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.

Paul is telling Timothy good-bye and two metaphors dominate these verses: sacrifice and departure. Paul was in effect saying: I have done what is necessary in my time; now you, Timothy, must do what is necessary in your time.

What is remarkable about this passage is that Paul is talking about his departure from life. He understood this as being released, the release of life from his body in death. He does not seem to have a grim or defeated or inwardly despairing picture of himself. He sees himself as having lived a purposeful life, now living out a purposeful death, in another of many events of witness. As if already ticketed for a journey, Paul stands waiting for the hour of departure, ready for the anchor to be hoisted.

Paul guided and nurtured Timothy from at least as early as the middle part of Luke's Acts (see Acts 16:1 ff.). Paul has been a friend of Timothy's family (2 Timothy 1:5). They had evangelized together, taught together, and broken bread together for much of Paul's ministry. Now Paul has some final words of counsel for his young gospel apprentice. Paul's angle for the writing of his epistle to Timothy is one of retrospective. Paul's viewpoint is from one who, as he looks back, offers encouragement to one who must look ahead.

One of the ways that all of us take measure of our life is to look back over the



shoulder of our years. Where are the places that we have succeeded, and where have we failed to do our best. In terms of the stewardship of God's resources, this is the kind of perspective that can help stewards measure their stewardship. Paul helps all of us make this measurement.

Paul uses sacrificial language about his ministry. He writes that he has been "poured out as a libation." This sounds much like those who sacrificed to God during the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings (Numbers 15:5, 7). Then with regard to Paul's own faith, often tested, he writes using a few sporting metaphors that would have been obvious in Greek culture in the first century. Paul has, as he writes, "fought the good fight . . . [and has] finished the race." Fighting the good fight and finishing the race give Paul's words a ring of authenticity. Paul knows what he is writing about. Paul's own experience in proclaiming the gospel gives his words credence for the young Timothy.

What is remarkable about Paul's words to Timothy is that Paul shares his own lived experience. He does not counsel Timothy on matters about which he has no awareness. Rather Paul writes from his own remarkable life. Thus Paul's words ring true.

I once visited an older man in one of my parishes who was exceedingly wealthy, but lived as an ordinary person without pretension. We became fast friends over the years. This man did nothing outside of caring for his wife who was a stroke victim. On my first visit to his house he told me a man from the church had asked him to make a large contribution to the church's endowment fund. Evidently as a way to evaluate his new pastor and to shed some light on the person who asked him about the endowment, he asked me, "Preacher, what would you have done if you had been in my shoes?" Plainly, the endowment inquirer seemed slightly disingenuous to my friend.

I thought for a moment and said, "Mr. ____, I think I would have asked him what he had done for the church's endowment." This struck a chord with my new



friend because he said to me, “Preacher, that is exactly what I asked him.” Over time, Mr. ___ offered much to our church by way of financial support. Yet he never offered anything to the church’s endowment. My guess is that he avoided the endowment because he did not feel the person who solicited him on the endowment’s behalf was genuine.

As stewards, using an old cliché, we must practice what we preach. When Paul counsels Timothy, Paul did so as one who walked the faith path. As stewards the chief element in sharing a stewardship message with others is to make certain our own stewardship house is in order. The most influential stewardship witness we can make is to be good stewards. Our lives offer the most persuasive argument possible about what we believe. Looking back over our stewardship offers proof about our faith’s sincerity.

David Neil Mosser, FUMC of Arlington, TX 76011