

2 Timothy 2:1-2

Dear Friends in Christ,

When you hear the Apostle Paul mentioned you probably think of mission work. You think of a man who had persecuted Christians. You think of his conversion on the road to Damascus. What you might not think about is that he was commissioned for his first mission trip together with Barnabas by the members of the first multicultural Christian congregation, the church in Antioch, the place where Christians with Jewish backgrounds for the first time purposely reached out to non-Jews with the Gospel. Antioch is now a part of Turkey. On his first mission trip, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and established Christian churches in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. When Paul revisited these churches on his second mission trip, he took on another role, the role of seminary professor.

Paul didn't establish a school or a school system in these cities. What he did was choose a young man by the name of Timothy to be one of the people he would train to be his replacement. Timothy had been given a good background in the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. As Paul learned to know him he could see fruits of faith in Timothy's life. The members of the congregations in Lystra and Iconium also spoke well of him. They must have told Paul that he seemed to have the talents and abilities necessary to become a pastor and teacher in the church. So, Paul took Timothy with him on his mission trips. It was on the job training.

As Timothy traveled with Paul he heard him preach and teach in many different situations. In established congregations Timothy heard Paul preach what we hear he preach to us still today, **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace in Christ Jesus, salvation is by grace through faith.** In market places he heard him evangelizing those who never heard of Jesus and didn't know the true God. He heard Paul witness to governors and jailors and fellow prisoners when he was arrested for proclaiming salvation in the crucified and risen Christ alone. He had heard Paul boldly proclaim salvation by grace through faith in Jesus **in the presence of many witnesses.** When the time came, Paul sent him (we might say assigned him) to serve at congregations in Thessalonica, Macedonia, Corinth and finally as the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

Paul wrote these words to Timothy while he was in prison in Rome for the second time. He was convinced that this time, he would not be released. This second letter to Timothy is his farewell letter. As he thinks about the future he realizes how easy it is for the church to lose the truth and fall into error. If one generation fails to pass the truth on to the next generation the truth could be lost. So he encourages Timothy, **you... my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**

The mantle is passing. Paul is not going to be around much longer. Timothy has already had to deal with false prophets and false teaching, primarily with those who wanted to add observance of laws as a requirement for salvation. Paul says, "**be strong.** Don't give in. Don't let anything be added to the gospel. Remember that you are saved by grace alone and continue to proclaim salvation by grace alone in Jesus no matter what."

But it's not enough for Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Like Paul, Timothy is mortal; he won't be around forever either. He needs to make sure that the proclamation of the truth doesn't stop with him. What Paul did for him, training and equipping him to preach and teach the truth to the next generation, he needs to do for the generation

that will follow him. **The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.**

The emphasis of Walking Together Sunday this year is worker training. Worker training was one of the main reasons that four pastors in the Milwaukee area got together near the end of 1849 and decided to form a Synod. They, and others, had come from mission schools in Europe. They had been sent to America to do mission work and to gather Christians who had come to this country into congregations. But they were finding that as they established congregations, there weren't enough pastors and teachers to serve them. The mission schools they had come from weren't able to keep up with the demand for workers and many of the workers that were available were not properly trained in sound Bible doctrine. Like the Apostle Paul, they saw that if the truth was going to be passed on to the next generation they were going to have to have a way to train **reliable men who would also be qualified to teach** the truth of God's word to others. Within a few years after the formation of the Synod a college was established in Watertown WI, and a few years later a Seminary program was added.

At about the same time a group in Michigan was doing the same thing. They established a school in Saginaw called Michigan Lutheran Seminary. And about the same time, a group in Minnesota established a school in New Ulm. Eventually these three groups, together with a group of believers in NE, merged to form what we call today the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Over the years the schools in Saginaw and Watertown have changed from college level training to high school level training and now serve as our two preparatory high schools. The school in New Ulm has been renamed "Martin Luther College" and serves as our training school for ministry, preparing young men and women to serve congregations as pre-school teachers, elementary and high school teachers, and staff ministers; and preparing young men to go on to our seminary in Mequon WI. All these schools are subsidized by our offerings because, like Paul, we see how important it is to **provide reliable pastors and teachers who stand firm in the grace that is in Christ Jesus** for each succeeding generation.

It's important for us, walking together as a Synod, to support schools that help train pastors and teachers for the next generation of believers, but remember where such training starts. Just as it did for Timothy, Christian training starts in the Home. If we are to have workers for the future who are reliable and stand firm in the grace of Jesus Christ they need to be given a firm foundation in that grace, by word and example by their parents. If we are to have workers for the future who are reliable and stand firm in the grace of Christ Jesus they need to receive careful instruction from Sunday School teachers, Christian grade school teachers if the congregation has a school, their pastors in catechism class, and they need encouragement by members of their home congregation who recognize that they have the gifts to teach others. It is the responsibility of each of us to encourage young men and women to consider serving their Lord as pastors and teachers. It's important to do this even when there is a "surplus" of workers, for those we encourage today won't be ready to begin their service for 8-12 years. We don't know how many workers might be needed then. And even if there still is a "surplus" of workers then, God will provide ways for them to serve; maybe as faithful leaders in their home congregations, or as English teachers in China or some other country where they can let the light of their faith shine.

When we think synod, we often think missions. That's great. It's wonderful to hear how our offerings help spread the gospel all over the world. But, as Paul wrote to the Romans, **How,**

then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Yes, it's true, every Christian is a missionary. Each of us has the responsibility to share the good news about Jesus with others. Yes, friendship evangelism is the #1, most effective way to bring someone to Jesus. But as we do share our faith and God blesses the word as we share it, the visible church grows. As it grows there is a need for more pastors and teachers. The world is a big place, there are millions who still need hear gospel, right next door, and in places like Indonesia and West Timor, and even Pakistan. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

As we have been blessed by God to preach and teach the gospel in places like Africa and Japan and South America, we have been able to establish schools and seminaries on site to prepare reliable men who are qualified to teach others not only so that the truth of God's grace in Jesus can be passed on to the next generation in their own countries, but so that the truth can continue to be preached and taught if we are forced to leave those areas because of finances or government persecution. What blessing it is to see fruits of these efforts as every 3 years leaders from all over the world who have been trained in their own countries gather for the CELC (Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference) convention.

Especially as we are living in the last days we see the need to instruct future pastors and teachers in the truth so that we and they can continue to stand firm in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What a blessing God given us in the training system he has allowed us to develop. Pray each day that God would continue to keep those teaching future pastors and teachers firm in grace and preserve them from error. Pray that the Lord will continue to provide reliable workers who will be qualified to teach our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Remember, despite what it might look like to us at times, from God's perspective, the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send workers into his harvest field.