

Psalm 119 (Beth): 9-16

Hymn: "Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head"-647 LSB

I Timothy 4:12-16

Lord Jesus, make us strong by your Word and Spirit that we might be faithful in our life and doctrine to your will and so be fit and useful servants in your church. Amen.

Today's text is especially fitting for a seminary chapel service. Paul instructs Timothy, this young servant of Christ Jesus, in pastoral theology. Timothy's youth is no obstacle for the Gospel. Age in and of itself is no guarantee of spiritual maturity. So the Apostle says to Timothy "let no man despise your youth." Congregations might prefer an experienced pastor who is seasoned by long years of service. There is the story about a congregational call committee searching for a pastor who had thirty years of experience, who can identify with the aged, and was young enough to relate well with teen agers. Paul sees Timothy's youth neither as a liability or an asset. Young or old, there are other characteristics which are essential.

Timothy is to be an example. Paul could be bold enough to write to the Philippians urging them to imitate him even as he imitates Christ. There is an old saying in the church that the life of the pastor is the Bible of the laity. That saying is capable of grand abuse but there is still more than a little truth contained in it. No one is saved by the preacher's life but the scandalous life of the preacher can be a stumbling block for people hearing the word of the gospel which alone is the power of God for salvation. Timothy is to be an example in five things says Paul: In speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

In speech, the prayer of the psalmist that God would set a guard over the door of his lips is critical. His lips are to guard truth and be purified from the lies of false teaching, empty words, deceit, and gossip. Speaking the truth in love, the speech of the pastor is to edify, build up the hearer.

In conduct, a friend of mine calls the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, "table etiquette" for pastors in God's house. Paul instructs Timothy have he is to behave in the Lord's house, walking in a way that does not provoke reproach or charges of hypocrisy from those outside the family of faith.

In love, just as the Good Shepherd loved his sheep and laid down his life for them so the faithful under-shepherds of Jesus Christ will love the flock God has entrusted to their care, always seeking their well-being even to the point of life-giving sacrifice.

In faith, the servant of Jesus Christ models firm trust in the promises of Jesus Christ. He knows that the Gospel is true not just in theory or principle for him and his salvation. He knows that Jesus Christ died and rose again for his redemption. He knows himself to be on the receiving end of Christ's forgiveness.

In purity, in the midst of a world that delights to see pastors fall into sins of sexual immorality, the pastor lives as one who knows that his body belongs to the Lord who purchased him with the price of his holy blood and so he lives not to indulge his passions and lust but in Christ and for him.

First and foremost, the pastor is a minister of the Word so he gives attention to the public reading of Scriptures. He is charged with and accountable for the way of the Word of God is used in the Divine Service. He exhorts in his preaching, urging his hearers to a lively confidence in Christ Jesus and a life of good works which serve the neighbor. He is straight-forward and clear in his teaching.

Paul exhorts Timothy to devote himself to these things so that his progress will be recognized. One who is put in the office of over-sight must keep an eye out not only for the flock but for himself so Paul says “keep a close watch on yourself and your teaching.” Life and doctrine go hand in hand here. Paul says that pastors are to be persistent in these things for in doing so they will save both themselves and their hearers.

Now having heard this rather high bar that God sets for pastors in his church, you might well say with Paul himself in II Corinthians, “who is sufficient for these things?” Truth is that none of us is sufficient for these things, not in ourselves. For sufficiency is in Christ and his righteousness alone. So Paul directs Timothy back to the fact that in his ordination, he was given a gift. It was not the endowment of a priestly or indelible character. It was the gift of the risen Lord himself. This gift is the promise that he will be with his servants, never leaving or forsaking us, but using our mouths, he will proclaim His Word and that Word will not return to him empty but accomplish the purpose for which he sent it. That is the gift we also rely on as we practice these things which the Apostle sets before us, as we devote ourselves now in this place and time to God’s Word.

Amen.