

LTS Chapel
Tshwane, SA

Thursday in Trinity 9
17 August 2017

Psalm: Ps. 119:9-16

Hymn: "God of the Prophets, Bless the Prophets' Sons"-682 LSB

Text: I Timothy 5:12-16

Today's text is right at home in a seminary community such as ours. The Apostle Paul exhorts and encourages a young man, Timothy, who had been his own seminarian, in the life that he is to lead and the office into which he was ordained. Paul says let no man despise your youth for Timothy's competency and credibility are not based on his long and seasoned years of experience but on the office and gift he has received from the Triune God. The Lord has chosen him for service and through the church he has been called to the preaching office, ordained with the laying on of hands. Now this is something that many of you as students of people aspire to. You are being prepared by study and prayer for this holy office. You anticipate and look forward to the day when your studies here will be completed. Then you will be examined by the church and declared ready to take on the responsibilities of the office of the holy ministry. You will kneel before the Lord's altar, hand will be laid on your head as the Spirit is invoked. A stole will be hung around your neck as you are put into the office that Timothy occupied.

It has been said that the life of the pastor is the Bible of the people. In other words, people learn from the example of their shepherd. Paul exhorts Timothy: "set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." The words on the pastor's lips are to be the words of Jesus. He is to speak God's truth in love for the building up of faith. The OT prophet says that the lips of the priest are to guard knowledge. Throughout the pastoral epistles, Paul accents the fact that preachers of Jesus Christ are not to utter worthless things that lead to doubt and false belief, but are to teach sound, that is, healthy doctrine.

What the pastor says with his lips is not to be contradicted by his personal life. Instead Paul says that he is to be an example in his conduct. He is not to say one thing but do another. His teaching and life are of one piece, a single fabric. The life that he lives is one of self-giving love modeled after Jesus Himself. This is the love that suffers all, giving up ones' own reputation, honor, and even his life for the good of the flock committed to His care. The pastor is to be an example in faith, trusting in the promises of God and reliant on Him for all good. His life is to be marked by purity, not given to greed, drunkenness, or sexual immorality.

Pastors are servants of the Word. It is given to them to stand before the Holy Scriptures, neither adding anything to God's revelation or taking away aspects of His Word that make us uncomfortable or unpopular in the eyes of the world. Thus Paul says that Timothy is to give attention to the public reading of Scripture. He is not just reading the Bible as a solitary Christian but as Christ's servant he is to read the Scriptures in the Divine Service and proclaim their holy truth in sermons which rightly distinguish God's Law from His Gospel so that people are brought to repentance and faith.

This is what pastors are given to do. That is why Paul refers to the office itself as a gift. It is not an entitlement. It is not something you are achieved by your own efforts and perseverance. It is a gift. It is given for the sake of the church as Paul says in Ephesians 4 that the Ascended Lord gave gifts to His church that is send prophets, apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers. If you are already a pastor, know that you have received this gift not for yourself but for the Lord's people. If you are preparing for ordination, know that this is what God will give you not as a personal entitlement but as a gift for service to His people.

But these things into practice is the directive Paul gives to Timothy so that people may see your progress. This is a verse that we often use with men at our seminary in the USA who are sent out for vicarage. It is a good word for you as well. Persist, Paul says, in these things as keep an eye out on yourself and your teaching. You will save yourself and your hearers. The Word which brings the forgiveness of sins and salvation to those who hear you is the same Word that delivers you into life everlasting.

In this rehearsal of the Lord's own standards and expectations for those men who are called to be pastors in His church we might well cry out as Paul did in II Corinthians, "who is sufficient for these things?" Our sufficiency is not in ourselves but in Christ Jesus who gave Himself up as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross and was raised again for our justification. It is only in Him, with faith in His promises that we undertake the work of shepherding God's flock. We do so in the confidence that the Lord who has begun this good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. To Him be all the glory. Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless