

## Proper 19C – It is Good to be the Chief

1. For the next several weeks we'll be focusing on our Epistle lessons from Paul's first letter to Timothy
  - a. So, to begin let's delve into a little background to set the stage for our discussions
    - i. First Timothy is one of three pastoral letters (including 2 Timothy and Titus) that the aging apostle Paul sent to those who would continue his work.
    - ii. Timothy's father was Greek and his mother was a Jewish Christian (Ac 16:1). Paul refers to Timothy as "**my true child in the faith**," (1:2) that is Paul's spiritual son.
    - iii. Paul had assigned him to lead the church at Ephesus.
    - iv. This letter was written in the 60s AD, counseled the young man on matters of church leadership—from proper worship to qualifications for overseers (elders) and deacons, to advice on confronting false teaching and how to treat various individuals within a congregation.
  - b. Paul states the purpose of his writing up front, "**The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**" (1:5)
    - i. And he identifies the main problem that Timothy is going to face in the congregation, "**Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.**" (1:7)
    - ii. So how does one accomplish said task...how do you love from a pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith and not wander off in vain discussions?
2. You have to know who you are - before you can lead in faith a leader has to know who he is, and that's what Paul delves into to start the letter, he sets the stage for Timothy.
  - a. In the world we are taught to strive to be number one: to be top of the class, most promising on the job, best on the team, etc – in hopes that one day we'll be in charge, we'll be chief, we'll be the one directing others
    - i. There are a lot of perks to being chief – it's good to be chief
    - ii. Usually, you're the one getting the accolades, making a higher salary
    - iii. There's more freedom to exercise your will and the direction you want other people to go
    - iv. But you normally don't get there by emphasizing your weaknesses
  - b. In our reading from I Tim this morning Paul advises his young protégé about the hard work of leadership in a congregation; being in charge of their spiritual care
    - i. In the verses before ours he says, "**As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...**" (1:3)
    - ii. As the overseeing pastor it was his job to set the direction of the congregation theologically, make sure everyone 's got the right program
    - iii. Part of that task would require Timothy to preach the Law to identify sin so that there might be repentance, "**Now we know that the law is good, if**

**one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient..." (1:8)**

- iv. So far so good, we have the common misunderstanding that it's the job of the leader to kick butt and make everyone toe the line even in the church
- c. That's easy when you think that all of the problems are with the other guy
  - i. We've certainly seen our share of finger pointing over the past 4 to 6 years, it's always the other guy's fault: Clinton, Obama, Trump, Biden, Putin, the January 6<sup>th</sup> people, the BLM people...the problem is always someone else
  - ii. That sounds like what Paul goes on to say about Timothy preaching the Law to, **"the ungodly and sinners...the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."** (1:9-10)
  - iii. And if that had been the end of the story, we might think, "Yea I've got a few people I'd like to tell a thing or two, thank God I'm not like them."
- 3. If only he'd stopped with **"the law is for the lawless and disobedient"** - THEM
  - a. But he doesn't he goes on, **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (or in the KJV "Chief")"** (I Tim 1:15)
    - i. Yes, the purpose of the Law is to reveal sin, but not primarily other peoples' sin, that only leads to pride and arrogance
    - ii. The purpose of the Law is to reveal first our own sin so that we recognize that no matter how good we are in our own eyes it's God's that count
    - iii. It's good to be chief...or is it?
  - b. "But wait a minute," we protest, "I'm no murderer, not sexually immoral...I can't be as bad as all that!" – But the Law says something different
    - i. You have heard it said you shall not murder but he who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.
    - ii. You have heard it said you shall not commit adultery but then whoever looks at a woman with lust in his heart has committed adultery already
    - iii. The heart is desperately wicked who can understand it – it'll call good evil and evil good in order to exonerate itself with, "Wait I can explain..."
    - iv. If the apostle Paul knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that before the bar of the Law, his sentence was guilty then we need not concern ourselves with others' guilt when we have enough of our own
    - v. If that's how the Apostle Paul sees himself what does that say about how we should view ourselves?
  - c. However, it's in our very weakness that there is hope because what the Law failed to do because our flesh is weakened by sin God did by sending His Son, who was punished as the chief of sinners for us
    - i. Listen again to what Paul said, **"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"**

- ii. Did you hear that? Praise God that sinners aren't just THEM because if Christ came to save sinners and it's only them then He didn't come for you!
  - iii. There's no fear that you should be numbered among the sinners, even chief of them all, because that's who he came for, a blessed assurance!
  - iv. Listen to Paul as he goes on, "**But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.**" (I Tim 1:16)
- d. And having been brought to our knees in praise and thanksgiving for the wondrous love that caused Him to die for us we know what we have to do
- i. We don't point out sin in every place that we find it, nor gloat over the fact that we've been rescued but we bring others to the foot of the cross
  - ii. Through the Law we know we're no better off than anyone else, but like one who knows the way out of fire we alert others to their peril and point them to sure path of safety and life
  - iii. We are living testimonies to the hope that we have in Christ, eagerly inviting others to meet Him where He may be found, right here in His church, that they too receive mercy and grace.
  - iv. It is good to be the chief, chief of sinners, like Paul, because Christ only came into the world to save sinners like you and me.