

Sharing Ministry

Today we begin several weeks of readings from the First and Second letters to Timothy. These two letters and the one to Titus are often called “Pastoral Letters” because they are filled with encouragements for church ministries, organization, discipline, doctrine. These letters show us how the church’s life and growth is dependent upon sharing ministry.

Of course, at the heart of these letters is the relationships Paul had with Timothy and Titus, his trusted associates, colleagues and friends. Paul often refers to Timothy as his “brother,” his “loyal child,” his “true child in the faith.” After meeting Timothy, probably in Lystra during Paul’s first missionary journey, Paul encourages Timothy to join him in his travels. We know Timothy helped to build up the churches founded by Paul in Ephesus, Corinth and Thessalonica.

Paul shares the apostolic ministry-teaching, preaching, healing-with Timothy. He urges Timothy, as a young, energetic servant of Christ to build up the church, endure suffering and combat false teachings. This encouragement is for all who share the ministry, in every generation-clergy and lay, paid professionals and volunteers, young and old. Build up the Church. Endure the challenges to your life, to your community. Combat false teaching, those who lie and deceive. These are good words for us at Grace as we begin this transition, as I leave and we all start a new chapter in sharing ministry and serving Jesus.

Jesus built his community of disciples to share ministry. He empowered them with his Spirit to go out into all the world and make disciples, baptize, teach, heal. As the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees and scribes, excluded those considered to be sinners; Jesus included them. He ate with them. He practiced radical hospitality and the shared parables about those who were lost being found.

Jesus’ parables of the lost speak to us in two ways. First, the ministry we share is to join in God’s search for those who are lost, for those who don’t know love, who don’t have health, who live in fear, who feel cast out. Our “walk in love” today into our neighborhood is a sign of our search to invite, to welcome, to stand with, and help and support any in this geographical community who feel pushed out, lost in a culture steeped with racism, fear of the immigrant, policies of oppression and injustice.

But we also know our own “lostness.” Those places in our lives where we feel our own lost from God and from God’s love. Can we allow God to find us, fill us with mercy and grace? This amazing grace of the God who seeks and can find each one of us calls us into life in community, in this parish, in Grace Church, so we can share ministry, as we know and live by God’s grace.

This is what Paul wants Timothy to remember. You can only share ministry as you know the mercy and grace that “overflow” from “faith and love in Christ Jesus.”

Sharing ministry in every place, in every time is dependent upon the life we share in Christ, in our relationships with one another, and in our relationship with Jesus.

The two letters to Timothy span several years. At the end of the second letter Paul writes from house imprisonment. He wants to give Timothy some final advice, last words. Timothy will continue on,

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Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 15, 2019

so Paul writes "The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Paul asks Timothy to try to visit him soon. When Timothy comes Paul asks him to bring his cloak, his books and "above all the parchments" (4:6-13). Paul wants to continue to write, to share in the ministry until his final breath.

We can't know where Jesus will lead us. We can try to keep the faith and finish the race. The grace of 30 years at Grace for me has been sharing ministry with so many of you, and with so many who have gone on before us. Thanks be to God.