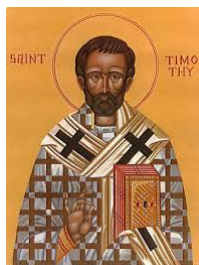


You've Got Mail: A Journey Through A Few of Paul's Letters
LEADERSHIP – A Letter to Timothy
Message for August 25, 2019
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

A friend gave me a book a while back to look at that had a chapter that narrated what it might have been like for Timothy as he received Paul's letter.

Now Paul wrote Timothy two letters.



Timothy had become a Christian after Paul's visit to Lystra, during his first missionary journey, which we read about in Acts 16. Timothy joined Paul in Ephesus and was instructed by Paul to stay...



Library of Celsus in Ephesus

...and minister to the church in Ephesus while he journeyed on to Macedonia. It was in Macedonia, around 62-63 AD that Paul wrote I Timothy, encouraging and teaching Timothy, who as a young minister faced all sorts of pressures, conflicts,...



**Temple of Greek god Artemis
in Ephesus**

...and challenges from the church and the surrounding culture.

Over the next several years, Paul continued to travel and many, including historian Clement of Rome, believe that Paul reached Spain, “the limits of the West.” Paul may have been in Spain from 64-66 AD, before traveling back to Troas where he would once again be arrested.

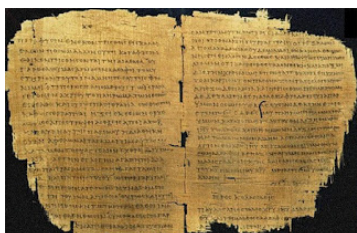
Christianity had become an illegal religion in the Roman Empire after Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome in 64 AD. Paul’s enemies were able to easily have him arrested. He was imprisoned in a Roman cell in 67 AD and it is here he wrote II Timothy.



It was here he was, according to tradition, beheaded.

The book Tom lent me is by C.J. Mahaney called The Cross Centered Life. Listen to his narrative description of what Timothy may have been feeling when he received Paul’s second letter.

Timothy’s hands trembled as he read. He almost cradled the letter...



...as though his gentleness with the parchment would somehow be conveyed to its author, now chained in a cold Roman dungeon.

The letter came from the apostle Paul; it would be his last.

For years Timothy had pushed the thought of losing Paul out of his mind. Paul had been like a father. A friend and mentor who guided and instructed the young pastor. How could he minister without Paul’s reassuring words, his confidence, his prayers? But now, Timothy knew Paul’s death was imminent.

“I am already being poured out like a drink offering,” Paul wrote, “and the time has come for my departure” (2 Timothy 4:6).

Timothy read the closing lines of the letter through his tears. But then he stopped and pushed them away abruptly. How could he wallow in grief when his old friend faced death so boldly?

*He could almost hear the voice of Paul through the words on the page: **“Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship...discharge all the duties of your ministry”** (2 Timothy 4:5).*

Now Timothy began to read the letter again. He read slow, deliberately. His eyes bored into each word, each sentence. In the closing moments of Paul’s life, would God give him a flash of insight that he would pass on to Timothy? Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, a man who had been swept up into heaven itself. What special insight, like a long forgotten key, would he now reveal?

As Timothy read, heart pounding, the truth – the key hit him with piercing clarity. He saw more clearly than ever what Paul had given his life to – and for which Timothy, too, would spend himself.

The message of Paul’s final letter revealed no new truth, no hidden knowledge, just “one truth” he had given his life to spread. The good news. The news of the cross.

And now the letter, which at first reading had been to Timothy the obituary of his dearest friend, became a joy-filled, bold restatement of all Paul had lived for, and all he would soon die for.

***“Of the gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher...I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed”** (2 Timothy 1:11-12).*

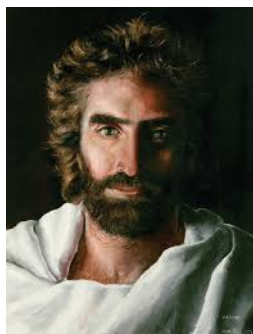
*The words seemed to shout from the page: **“What you heard from me, keep as a pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 1:13).*

*Timothy could almost see Paul’s fiery eyes blazing into his own, feel his gnarled fingers gripping his arm. **“Guard the good deposit that has been entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us”** (2 Timothy 1:14).*

You don’t need a new truth, he heard his old friend saying. Guard the one truth. Keep the one message.

***“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel”** (2 Timothy 2:8).*

Today, we are focusing on Paul’s first letter to Timothy. Paul knows there are false teachers in the church and the church is being immersed in endless debates, irrelevant questions, and controversy that is taking the congregation’s focus off of the central message of the Gospel...



...the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul tells Timothy that he is “giving [him] *these instructions*” so Timothy “*can wage a good war,*” be a good leader as it was prophesied he would be, and bring the church back into focus.

Paul understands that what is needed is leadership. Timothy needs to be the leader God called him to be and needs to train others in the church to preach, teach, minister, and serve, that the Christians at Ephesus would not stray from the central message...would not stray from the One who changed his life, the one Paul is willing to be imprisoned for and to die for, Jesus Christ. As Paul writes in I Timothy 2:5, “***There is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the human Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a payment to set all people free.***”

Paul writes Timothy encouraging and teaching him and others who are leaders in the church, that they “***...may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth***” (I Timothy 3:15).

His words do not just hold true for those of you who are in leadership positions at North East UMC, but to everyone who professes to be a Christian, who represents Christ to the community of North East and beyond. It holds true to all who are in leadership positions when it comes to their families, their children, their workplace. Every day we make choices that will affect our church, our witness, our homes, the people we influence, those whose lives are connected to ours in some way.

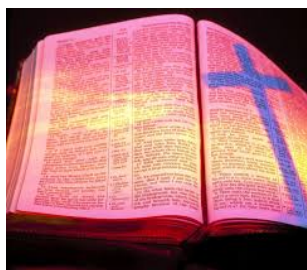
As James C. Hunter writes, “*Will I be patient or impatient? Kind or unkind? Puffed up, boastful, and arrogant, or humble? Respectful or disrespectful? Selfless or selfish? Forgiving or unforgiving? Honest or dishonest? Committed or just involved?...[Will the people I lead, I am around,] be better human beings as a result of having contact [with me]? Will they be inspired to do the right thing and develop their character? Indeed the ultimate test of leadership is this: Are the people better off when they leave than when they got there?*”

But even more importantly, Paul would challenge each of us to ask, “*Will the people I lead and am around...will they find and discover and be drawn to the love of Jesus Christ...will my words, my actions, my character, help point them toward a saving relationship with the*

‘immortal, invisible, and only God’ ...will I help them stay focused on the person and work and mission of Jesus Christ and His Church, leading them to become disciples and together, to join God in His work on earth?” Will I make sure as a leader and a Christian that I **“give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully”** of me or the church (1 Timothy 5:14).

Paul lays out for Timothy and us how we, as Christians, as leaders, should conduct ourselves. Paul writes, **“...exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come”** (I Timothy 4:7-8).

Pray. Study God’s Word...



...Be *“a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine,”* Paul later writes. It is so important that leaders in the church, as leaders of our families and community, as representatives of Jesus Christ, we meditate on Holy things. And our progress should be evident...people should see Christ in us...see us growing in our love of God...in our service for God...in our attitudes, our willingness to forgive, our patience, our love for others. Paul writes, *“...in doing this,”* by people seeing the change in you, the growth in you, *“you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* (I Timothy 4: 15-16).

As Christians, as leaders, we are called to a higher standard. We are called to be ***“...temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well...not a novice...moreover he must have a good testimony”*** (taken from I Timothy 3: 1-7). ***We are to “make [ourselves] attractive by doing good,” by continuing in “faith, love, and holiness, together with self-control”*** (I Timothy 2: 10, 15).

Paul tells us we are to ***“guard what was committed to [our] trust,” pursuing “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness”*** (I Timothy 6: 11, 20).

Paul is clear in his letters to Timothy that leadership is tied to character. Just ask yourselves, “Do people of low character have influence with you and inspire you to action? Do people of low character, questionable morals, speech filled with gossip, attract people to the church?”

If we are to be the Christian leaders that Paul calls Timothy and others in the church at Ephesus to be we must start with our character, we must start with our behavior, we must start with our relationship with God... We may have to change years of ingrained habits and behaviors... we may have to turn our lives around, no longer giving into the culture that surrounds us... we may have to keep our speech in check, our anger in check, our judgment of others in check... we may have to spend time not only on our knees but looking in the mirror in order to become the Christian man or woman God has created us to be... the Christian man or woman God wants to lead His church, His people... to impact His world with His Son, Jesus Christ...

As Hunter writes, *“We can choose to be something different than we are today. It is never too late to learn and grow. If you are too old or lazy to learn and grow, then you are too old or lazy to lead.”*

We have been entrusted with tremendous gifts... the gift of this church, our church family, the facility and resources to make a difference in our community and world... We have been entrusted with families, many of us with children... We have been entrusted with workplaces where there are men and women who do not know God, people we see every day whom we can talk to and have an influence in their lives... We have been entrusted with a relationship with Jesus Christ and a knowledge of His mission to the world...

Paul is clear, *“Guard what was committed to your trust”* (I Timothy 6:20).

It is important to remember... as James C. Hunter writes... *“We all leave our mark on the organizations we choose to become a part of...”*



...The only question is, what kind of mark will we leave?... Human beings have been entrusted to our care, and much is at stake. I never cease to be amazed at how casually and nonchalantly people approach their leadership roles.”

Paul writes Timothy, as Christians, as leaders, we are called to *“run away from”* jealousy, conflict, evil suspicions, constant bickering, love of money, harmful passions, false teachings, and instead *“compete in the good fight of faith,”* obeying *“without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (taken from I Timothy 6: 3-14).

How can you be a better leader? How can you be a leader that creates more leaders? How are you being called by God to use your gifts, to lead, to *“guard”* and influence others? Are others being drawn to Christ and His Church through your character, your speech, your actions... because they see someone who is in shape spiritually? Are others growing closer to Christ because they see Christ in you?

Now, might we go forth...



...and “*compete in the good fight of faith*”...take our place as a leader in God’s church...His representative...obey and serve and lead “*without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ*”...”Guard what was committed to [our] trust”



...may our lives be, as Paul challenges Timothy, “*a good testimony*”...