

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2021**

**2 Timothy 2:1-13 (He is faithful)**

**Talk by Laura Polaine, Prayers by Margaret Davies**

Good morning and welcome to St Johns on-line reflection. Today, we will be focusing on 2 Timothy 2:1-13. First, Margaret will read the prayers.

### **Prayers**

Let us confess to God the wrongs in his sight: -

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation. Amen

John writes: - " If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Amen

Paul writes to two churches about prayer. To the Colossian church he says, " Be persistent in prayer and keep alert as you pray, giving thanks to God"

To the Corinthian church he says, " Give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes."

So, let us pray through the power of the Holy Spirit with thanks, keeping alert as we pray and ask for His help: -

O Lord our Heavenly Father,

We thank and praise you for all your blessings to us, our life and health, our families and friends, our food and shelter, but most of all for your gift to us of Jesus, dying for us, so we are forgiven and given the hope of eternal life with you forever. We worship you with awe and wonder. Thank you, Lord.

However, your world needs your help. We pray for governments, rulers and all authority given to people that they will govern wisely to bring peace and justice wherever the needs are. We pray especially for countries ruined by war, evil regimes and tribal and racial differences. Please bless Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Gaza and African countries like South Africa now. Give the Christian Missions and aid agencies the resources to bring relief to the homeless, hungry and refugees. We pray too for

Christians persecuted for their faith in Pakistan and Asian countries. Lord, give them courage and strength to stand faithful to you.

Almighty God, we pray against the pandemic of coronavirus spreading. May the distribution of vaccines be really efficient in the world and people behave responsibly to prevent infections. Bless those who are ill and heal them. Comfort those who are grieving for lost loved ones.

Lord God, you sent Jesus with the gospel of salvation for this fallen world. We pray for the mission partners who take your message of love and hope everywhere. Especially we pray for Tracey and Jason day in Thailand. They ask us to pray that Thais would hear the gospel proclaimed in a way they can hear and understand it, for the teenagers they have been mentoring with their daughters Libby and Ruby, that they would deepen their faith and we pray for online safety for all.

Our heavenly Father God, we pray for the worldwide Church. May all Christians in the service of Jesus Christ be united in your truth, live together in your love and reveal your glory in our needy world. Especially we pray for our diocese to choose the right new Bishop of Rochester to serve you and all our churches. Bless the preferred candidate for our church merging with Holy Trinity and that the process will be completed smoothly. Prepare us all to unite with compromises to fulfil your will for our community in spreading your love and the good news of Jesus. We pray that we are faithful to serve through our Food Bank, the Christians Against Poverty centre, Amaze Penge, Living Well and work with children, young people, schools and home groups. Bless all the leaders and members with your knowledge and love.

O Lord, give grace to our fellowship here, especially our wardens, the church council, leaders and preachers and to our families and friends, that we may serve Christ in one another, and love as He loves us. Please comfort and heal all those who suffer physically, mentally or spiritually. Especially we pray for healing for Will and Anthony, for continued improvement for Val and Andy, for comfort for Gemma's family grieving for Sid, for Lorraine K whose mother Angela died last week and for the Stutley family, former members of this church whose Jenny died recently. Bless them all and anyone you know to pray for now.....O Lord, hear our prayers for them.

Finally, we pray the special prayer for this Sunday, the Collect-

Lord of all power and might, the author of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name,  
Increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and in your great mercy keep us faithful;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

## Reading

Our reading today is taken from 2 Timothy - Chapter 2, verses 1-13. New International Version (NIV).

### The Appeal Renewed

**2** You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **2**And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. **3** Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4** No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. **5** Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. **6** The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. **7** Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

**8** Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, **9** for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. **10** Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

**11** Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him,  
we will also live with him;

**12** if we endure,  
we will also reign with him.

If we disown him,  
he will also disown us;

**13** if we are faithless,  
he remains faithful,  
for he cannot disown himself.

Can you remember a time when you received a handwritten letter? Whilst we may receive lots of emails and texts, there can be something quite personal in a hand-written letter. In the reading today, we learn more about the letter Paul has written to Timothy. Paul's letter would have meant a lot to Timothy, especially as at that time there would have been very little learning material available, other than possibly an early form of the Gospels and some Old Testament Scriptures. It is very different today where we have more devotional and motivational works including Christian magazines and websites, small groups, all which helps us in our daily lives.

Last week we looked at Paul's introduction to the letter which showed the love he had for Timothy 'his son in the faith'. He begins to remind Timothy, who is the pastor of the

church at Ephesus, of the qualities necessary for a faithful minister of Jesus Christ to remember his call and use his gifts with Spirit-empowered boldness, and to keep to the truth. In this week's passage we see he encourages him to prepare others to follow him in the ministry (v2:1,2), to be disciplined, to be ready to endure suffering (v2:3-7), and to keep his eyes and mind focused on Christ (v2:8-13).

Paul is writing his letter during his second imprisonment with the purpose to give final instructions and encouragement to Timothy. Paul was in a Roman prison, cut off from the world, probably with just a visitor or two and his writing materials. He knew he would soon be executed for being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth as we learn later in Timothy. Being Paul's last letter, it reveals his heart and his priorities – sound doctrine, steadfast faith, confident endurance, and lasting love. This is the most intimate and most moving of all Paul's letters.

The opening verse begins with 'You then my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus'. Paul is not giving a summons to Timothy to be strong in himself – to set his jaw and grit his teeth – but to 'be inwardly strengthened' by means of 'the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Grace is God's undeserved favour on our behalf. Grace means gift – it is the gift of Christ. Not earned but received through faith. Just as we are saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8,9) we should live by it (Colossians 2:6). It is not only in salvation that we are dependent on grace, but for service also. How are we to be strong through grace? It means trusting completely in Christ and his power, and not trying to live for Christ in our own strength alone. We are to receive and utilize Christ's power. He will give us the strength to do his work. John Barclay put it this way – 'Grace is the superglue that joins us to Christ'.

In Christian service Timothy is to teach others about Christ Jesus so it can be passed down from one generation to the next. Paul envisions the transmission in four stages. Firstly, the faith has been entrusted to Paul by Christ, secondly, the faith entrusted to Paul, Paul in turn entrusts to Timothy, thirdly, Timothy is now to entrust the faith 'to reliable people', and lastly these people will also teach others. This was to ensure the gospel continued to be spread, and today it continues through the church; through us and other disciples.

In following Christ, we know it will not always be easy. As Timothy preached and taught, he would face suffering, but he should be able to endure. Paul uses comparisons with soldiers, athletes, and farmers who must discipline themselves and be willing to sacrifice to achieve the results for which they strive.

In verses 3&4, Paul invites him to join him in suffering 'like a good soldier of Christ Jesus', and to not get 'entangled in civilian affairs'. In the context Paul was writing he was referring not to military warfare, but to disciplined obedience to endure hardship. The Roman empire had long since secured its dominance, but to maintain the borders was a continuing task. Soldiers were especially concentrated at the far-flung borders,

where insurrections were especially likely. This meant extensive training. There could be no weakening of resolve, skill, or strength. Daily discipline was enforced, diversions could not be tolerated. Because of the extensive distribution of the troops, Paul's image of the soldier's devotion was immediately recognizable and impressive. For us too, we are not to get entangled in things that distract us from the task of serving Christ. We are to remain focused on Christ. I remember one time I had a go at snowboarding and saw I was headed for a steep drop. Whilst not wanting to go there I kept looking in that direction, and not surprisingly I soon arrived at the edge, and had to do a complete stop, and reset my course again. Where we are focused, we go, and sometimes we need to stop, surrender ourselves back to Jesus so we are focused on him, and not distractions.

As we look at the athlete imagery, in the New Testament, the Christian life is often likened to a race, not in the sense that we are competing against each other, but in other ways, in the strenuous self-discipline of training (1 Cor.9:24-27), in laying aside every hindrance (Heb, 12:1,2) and here in verse 5 in keeping the rules. 'Anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.' Athletic contests were popular and highly valued in the Greco-Roman tradition. Cities were proud of their arenas, and winners were highly honoured. Keeping the rules was expected. For us too, we are to run the race 'lawfully'. To keep the rules, to obey God's moral laws. This applies both to our Christian life, and also to our Christian service.

If the athlete must play fair, the farmer must work hard. In Paul's time this was before mechanization and hard work in farming was as much needed as skill. In verse 6 it says 'the hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops'. But to what kind of harvest is Paul referring.

First holiness is a harvest. It is the fruit (or harvest) of the Spirit, in that the Spirit is himself the chief farmer who produces a crop of Christian qualities in the believer's life. Though, we have our part to play, too. We are to 'walk by the Spirit' and 'sow to the Spirit' (Gal 5:16; 6:8), following his promptings and disciplining ourselves, if we are to reap the harvest of holiness. It is important for us to cultivate the field of our character. Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap' (Gal. 6-7).

Secondly, the winning of new believers is a harvest too. 'The harvest is plentiful,' Jesus said, referring to the many who are waiting to hear and receive the gospel. Whilst it is of course 'God who gives the growth' (1 Cor 3:6,7), we are to play our part. Both the sowing of the good seed of God's word and the reaping of the harvest are hard work, especially when the laborers are few. There is no automatic application of a formula in bringing people to Christ, and can be by tears and sweat and pain, especially in prayer and in sacrificial personal friendship. Again, it is 'the hardworking farmer' who can expect good results.

In summary from these three analogies, Paul sets forth the call to service and suffering. He calls for single-minded desire to please God, that one must obey God's rules in order

to succeed, and to be encouraged to do hard work by holding out the promise of blessing. After giving these analogies Paul encourages Timothy to think over, reflect on the apostles teaching, listening to it carefully and applying his mind to it. For then the Lord will grant him understanding in everything. We are to do the same as we read the Bible.

In the second part of today's passage Paul moves from analogy to history. Timothy is asked to remember Jesus Christ. We may wonder why Paul is needing to write this, but the understanding is not that Paul thinks that Timothy is in danger of forgetting Jesus! Rather, this is a call to remain mindful of the truths of the gospel, which is centered on Jesus, the risen Messiah. There is encouragement for Timothy from the first part of the passage, but it is both the resurrection of Christ, and the promised messianic descendent, that provides the strongest motivation. It is the birth, death, resurrection and ascension are all implicit in these two expressions. There was false teaching at the time and many asserted that Christ was divine but not human – God but not man. Sometimes, today we hear from people that Jesus was human, but not divine – man but not God. Either view destroys the Good News that Jesus Christ has taken our sins on himself and has reconciled us to God. In this verse, Paul firmly states that Jesus is fully man (a descendant of King David) and fully God (raised from the dead).

Also, from Jesus Christ's own experience, there is the principle that death is the gateway to life and suffering the path to glory. Whilst Paul refers to his own suffering in chains in prison, 'God's word is not chained'. Paul was in chains in prison because of the Good News he preached, but he is prepared to endure for the sake of people coming to know Christ. The truth about Jesus is no more popular in our day than in Paul's, but it still receives receptive hearts. The truth of God's Word is being believed by people every day and changing their lives for eternity. When we are tempted to avoid pain, humiliation, suffering in our ministry, we are to remember Jesus Christ and think again. Whether the word is spread personally, or through missions and educational institutions, faithful Christians may not see the results or reap rewards until heaven.

The last three verses v11-13 MSG version, may well have been an early Christian hymn.

This is a sure thing:

If we die with him, we'll live with him;  
If we stick it out with him, we'll rule with him;  
If we turn our backs on him, he'll turn his back on us;  
If we give up on him, he does not give up—  
for there's no way he can be false to himself.

The closing 'sure thing' is here to encourage us in faithfulness. God's servants are judged for their faithfulness, not for their accomplishments. As Mother Teresa said, 'I am not called to be successful, but to be faithful'. Whilst eternal life is not dependent on

our faithfulness in Christian service, the Lord remains faithful. If we prove unfaithful, the Lord will be faithful to his own promise, his covenant sealed with his own blood.

As we take the baton first passed by Paul and as we seek to pass it on in our own generation, we are to take Paul's advice. If we're getting to see the gospel spread, we need to be like a soldier, like an athlete, and like a farmer. We are to keep going despite sufferings because of the thought of victory, the vision of winning, and the hope of the harvest. We will see that our suffering is worthwhile when we achieve our goal of glorifying God, bringing people to Christ, and one day living eternally with him.

**Prayer:**

Lord, we want to be useful to you, to be prepared to do good work. We want to seek your face, to bind ourselves to you. We dedicate ourselves to you again, today. May we bring the good news of Jesus to all those around, transforming society and changing our world in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

**Closing Prayer:**

God, give us eyes of faith, that we may choose your way in the face of the choices this week. Help us believe in your promise and to respond to your calling. In Jesus' name.

Amen