

## 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

### Poured Out

I was going to start this message by telling the story of a movie I watched when I was a teenager. It was about a mom who died and left her infant daughter a letter. As I could not remember the title, I did what many of us do, I did a Google search. Well, I came up short on the title of the movie, but found link after link to just that sort of thing, letters written to loved ones that were to be read after the death of the one who wrote the letter.

I have also had the privilege of sitting at the bedside of those who were dying and have experienced pretty much the gamut of emotions. From gratitude for life to fear the kind of death one would die, and everything in between with all the mixed up emotions. One person in particular comes to mind when I think of this passage of scripture. I could not tell you her name, as I don't remember it. It was a chance visit in a hospital room here in Thunder Bay. I had gone in to visit with someone from our congregation and ended up sitting on a hospital bed beside a woman I had never met before. As I was about to leave the room of the person I had come to visit, the person in the bed next to her began a conversation with me. It was lovely.

She explained that she was dying, but her words were calm, filled with gratitude and love. It was not that life had been an easy one for her, and certainly her imminent death was on her mind, but she shared of her life, her gratitude and hope. She had no doubt that she was going to be with God.

You may have had the opportunity and honour of sitting with someone still able to share their thoughts and hopes with you even as they knew they were dying. Or maybe it was a grandparent or mentor that in their later years were sharing words of wisdom with you. These are moments to cherish and ponder.

This is the setting for Paul. I say Paul as there is a growing consensus that the Apostle Paul did not actually write this letter to Timothy. Still, that does not detract from the content. We are to hear this as a mentor writing to a beloved person that they have spent time with, have worked with and grown with. Paul wrote the letter from prison. He had gotten out of trouble before, but this time death was going to happen. There was no escape from this prison. Paul states in verse 16, "At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me." This letter was penned at a time after the Roman empire had turned against Christians. Paul had little to no hope of freedom.

So Paul is writing Timothy. Throughout the last three weeks each service has taken us through passages of this letter. Today we come near its close. This is the last part of the letter. Even yet there is teaching, warnings, requests, and above all love. We should

feel something when we read these words, the heart-break of feeling abandoned by friends and colleagues. We might imagine Paul, allowed to write and yet sitting without all he needs for his well-being. In one of the verses that was skipped today in our reading, Paul simply asks that Timothy might bring the cloak that Paul had left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Paul was a very real person with real needs, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

In all of this, even with a story about harm that was done to Paul by Alexander the coppersmith, and the feelings of being deserted, Paul does not become bitter. He is cautious, offers a warning about people, but ends with, "May it not be counted against them!" (v16b) It sounds very similar to the words of Jesus from the cross "Forgive them Father for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). These words from Jesus and from Paul are words of grace and forgiveness, not judgement or hate.

The end goal for Paul was that, regardless of what he faced, he would live a life that proclaimed the gospel in word and deed. He poured out his life for Jesus, for the gospel message of hope, grace, love, and joy. In and through it all, even at the end of his life Paul wrote, "But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it." (v17)

We have considered much about the last verses of our text, but let's go back to the first verses we heard read. "As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith." (vv6-7)

For those who may need a refresher, Paul was once Saul, a most notorious persecutor of those who followed Jesus. After a stunning encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus, Paul's life was forever changed. Once the hunter of those who followed Jesus, he was now the one in chains because of his faith, his proclamation, his teaching about Jesus.

Paul has given it all. He has poured out his life for the sake of the gospel. It has been life-giving to others and to himself even as he faces death. His experience of Jesus, of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, the evidence and the knowledge has moved him, more than that, inspired his whole being and who he had become. Paul shared in ministry with others and especially with his beloved Timothy. He had seen first hand how the life-giving, life-saving message of faith had transformed lives, his own included.

He speaks of his departure but is satisfied that he has fought the good fight and finished the race that was set out for him to run. This race is not one that you compete to win, it is a race to share life with others, to live fully and trust that God always has been and always will be present. The final crowning glory is life in Christ, knowing God and Christ fully in death.

And if you don't like the thought of death, let me tell you if you haven't figured it out, that is the ending for each of us. Since January of this year alone I have done fourteen funeral services of some type, whether at the graveside, in the church or in a chapel.

We keep a list of those connected to our congregation that have passed away since All Saints Sunday last November so that we can speak those names this coming All Saints Sunday this year on November 6<sup>th</sup>. We have twenty names to say from our congregation alone and we add a few more names of people that are connected to loved ones of our congregation.

This scripture is mostly about how we will live. How will we make a difference in the lives of others, those we love and those we encounter? How will our living be an example of faith, trust, hope, forgiveness, perseverance and love?

This scripture is also about death. Do you trust that in life and in death the Lord stands by you and gives you strength, so that through you, through all of us, the message might be fully proclaimed, not only in words, but in our actions?

Paul's life story shows us that belief in God does not mean you are shielded from tragedy or hardship, but rather that despite all of that God is with you. You never stand alone even when it may be that you feel abandoned by others. God will strengthen you, stand by you. The Lord will rescue you from the lion's mouth, whatever that happens to be for you.

As Mary Schertz writes, [Paul] sees his life story within the larger framework of his trust in the Lord who overcomes evil. The lion's mouth is not the end."<sup>1</sup>

This is not a message of easy answers, but hopefully is one that will help you to ponder your life experience and how you share your faith, forgiveness, hope, and love. It is about being an example in life and in your dying for those who love you and maybe even those who don't know you at all.

The letter ends with these words, "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you." (v22) May they be a hope and comfort for you in the knowledge that God goes with you.

"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you."

---

<sup>1</sup> Copenhaver Martin B. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 4 Season After Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P210.