



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“First of all, then...” **Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:1-7**

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Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

It is fitting on this day, when we install Stephanie Boaz as our Associate Pastor for Congregational Care, that the lectionary text is from 1 Timothy. First Timothy and 2nd Timothy, along with Titus, are what is called “Pastoral Letters,” that is, spiritual care and guidance letters.

Now, 1 Timothy, although it is attributed to the Apostle Paul, is most likely written by a Paul wanna-be. Scholars think this because the style and vocabulary are very different from Paul's.

1 Timothy 2:1-7

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

This is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all--this was attested at the right time.

For this, I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

“First of all, then...” Not the words you want to hear from a preacher. Because you know when a preacher says, “First of all, then...,” you’ll soon be hearing a “Second of all,

then..." You think it might be coming soon, 15 minutes and 20 seconds in, finally you hear "Second of all, then". Is this a three point sermon, or a four point sermon? Kickoff is at noon!

Well, let me put you at ease. I'm not going any farther than "First of all, then...."

It was Stephanie who selected the scripture for today. After, she told me "First Timothy," I wondered, "Why 1st Timothy?"

Now, I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but Stephanie has a lot more personality than I do. She has a joyful spirit! God didn't give me that gift.

She smiles and laughs. She has hope, and I start my morning in A minor and pretty much stay there. I don't preach much from the pastoral letters for lots of reasons, and so I asked her, "Why did you choose 1 Timothy?" And Stephanie's eyes got really big, and she put on that big smile, and she said, "Well, prayers, intercessions, and Thanksgiving for EVERYONE! SALVATION FOR EVERYONE!"

I missed that when I read the scripture alone in my office. But Stephanie reads from a different translation of the Bible. She reads from the "I have a life" translation, and I read from IRS translation. If you're not familiar with that, it has the same font and tone as the instructions for a 1040 long form.

"First of all, then, I urge supplications..." Check. "Intercessions..." Check. "Prayers..." Check. "Thanksgiving..." Check!

That's how my translation read.

First of all, then.... my translation gets to everyone, but it doesn't begin with everyone. It doesn't translate to everyone – not the way I read it. Everyone has to start somewhere, so I start close to home with those I love. I pray thanksgiving for those to whom I am close, intercession for those I know, and then I move out from there. Sometimes, if I'm honest, my prayer life doesn't always end in "Amen." I get distracted. God receives partial texts from me.

I usually don't get around to praying for everyone. Do you know there are a lot of people included in everyone? "Thanksgiving" isn't for everyone! When you receive the invitation to come over for "Thanksgiving," the first question one asks is, "who is going to be there?" You like Turkey, you just don't like that turkey.

"Stephanie, why did you choose 1st Timothy?" And her eyes got big, and her smile beamed across her face, and she said, "Well, prayers, intercessions, and Thanksgiving for everyone! Salvation for everyone!"

"Oh, Stephanie! Bless your heart! You're in ministry! Didn't your preacher father warn you about ministry? My preacher father warned me. He said, "Go to Princeton Seminary." I said, "Why should I go to Princeton Seminary?" He said, "It will put you in line for larger churches." "Why do I want a large church?" He said, "It will dilute your problems." Those were code words for some of you.

Now, don't you get all uppity and think I'm talking about you. I am not talking about you. Except, I'm talking about you. For there are lots of little churches you could have joined, but you joined a large church. You know that if you sit next to this person, and you don't like them,

there's another pew near the aisle and door; you don't ever have to see that person again. If you like, you can attend the other service, and you can avoid passing the peace forever and ever, Amen. The big church dilutes your problems, and you know it!

Oh, you should have seen her face... the poor thing. So innocent! "Well, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for everyone! Salvation for everyone!" Can you all join me in a prayer for Stephenie? "Lord, be merciful to this woman. Let her down easy."

But Lord knows I'm joking. "First of all, then..." Let me be serious. Can I say that in the joy of Stephanie that I received a pastoral letter written upon her face? A letter that read, "Ministry is a joy." It is a joy! We need that!

It's so easy to look at ministry as a cross to bear. "It's so hard! Why do I have to care for him? He's lazy. He's opinionated. He's loud. He's obnoxious, really. Why do you have to care for him?" "Well, he's had surgery, he's your husband and you married him..."

It's easy to look at ministry as a cross to bear, and it is "If anyone wants to be my followers, one must take up their cross, and follow me." And you can hear all that in the key of A minor.

The pastoral letter that I received from Stephanie was a reminder that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, SALVATION IS FOR EVERYONE! It is the good news of the Gospel! "My yolk is easy, and the burden is light and joyful. It's for everyone! I'll have what she's drinking! She is drinking from the cup of salvation.

"First of all, then..." I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone! Good news is for everyone!

"First of all, then..." We can't get to "Second of all, then..." or "Third of all, then..." "First of all, then..." we look squarely and deeply into our own hearts and realize we have that joy, joy, joy deep down that Christ has raised us from the dead and what we receive we must also give.

I remember back in April of 2006, I was with about six other people on a front porch of a home in Louisiana, waiting to see if anyone was home. A woman answered the door and saw on our shirts, "Presbyterian Disaster Assistance." And she broke down and cried out, "I thought God had just about given up on me. Thank God!"

She was reading from a different translation. Mine read seven people in dirty jeans and smelly shirts on a front porch. She looked as if she'd had an epiphany. God showed up! She had a theology that said, "When you're in the darkest valley, when you're a lost sheep. God doesn't give up on you! When you're beaten up and left for dead on the side of the road, God doesn't give up on you! We're going to lift you up and take care of you. God will never give up on you."

When you're the prodigal who has done everything wrong - abused people, you're drunk too often - the only reason you come to repentance is because you're hungry! A little self-serving and shallow, don't you think? Still, God doesn't give up on you!

God never gives up on you! The cross of Jesus Christ is just that big, and salvation is for everyone! And there's amazing grace that saved a wretch like me, and with that comes great responsibility! Then, everyone, everyone has to know the joy of salvation!

Unless you want to whittle the cross down a little bit, and say there's some people on this earth who are beyond saving. There are some people in this world who do not deserve thanksgiving. If you want to whittle the cross down, and say the cross can only go so far, what can separate us from the love of God? "Well, I can think of a few people..." If you want to whittle the cross down to being that small, I suggest you quit the church, and you form another organization, and you come up with a symbol other than the cross of Jesus Christ.

Because what we're about is good news. And good news is surely lacking in this world. We have a call, folks, to smile, and to have this gospel written on our faces.

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"This is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all--this was attested at the right time."

"For this, I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying)!"

You can see it on her face. She's telling the truth, and I'm not lying.

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