

July 14, 2024

Pastor Prieue

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Titus 1:1-9 NIV

¹Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— ²in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

⁴To Titus, my true son in our common faith:

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

⁵The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

God's Servants

- 1) Are sent with his authority
- 2) To further the faith of God's elect
- 3) To be examples of godliness

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

The book of Hebrews starts this way. **“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”** (Heb. 1:1). That passage reminds us that for thousands of years before Jesus was born, God spoke to his people through intermediaries, through prophets, sent to speak his message on his behalf. **“Then when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son.”** (Gal. 4:4). During that time that God spoke to the world through his own Son, God in the flesh, living and breathing and walking among us. Realize though, how relatively short and isolated that period of Jesus' direct speaking was in the course of history. Jesus the Savior of the world lived for about 33 years in the region of Israel. His public ministry was even shorter, only about the last 3 years of his life, and even during that time, his 12 disciples were sent out to preach on his behalf, as we saw in the Gospel Reading from Mark 6:7-13

After Jesus died and rose from the dead, before he ascended into heaven, Jesus declared that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him and he commissioned his disciples and really all believers once and for all, to be his witnesses in the world, to speak the message of the gospel to all creation. This brief overview reveals something maybe a little surprising—the observation that for the majority of the world's history, God has chosen to delegate his holy authority as God to human beings for them to lead and serve his people on his behalf. From this fact comes our overall worship focus today on God's servants doing Meaningful Ministry. So our

sermon theme is: *God's Servants 1) are sent with God's own authority, 2) to further the faith of God's elect, 3) and to be examples of godliness.*

Our sermon text for today from Titus chapter 1 serves as New Testament example for us of how God continues to delegate his authority to believers and how believers continue to call or appoint leaders and overseers to use that authority. Paul introduces the letter by introducing himself. **“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” (Titus 1:1)** Paul was one who was actually called directly by the Lord Jesus Christ and sent out on his apostolic ministry That’s what it means to be an apostle—one who is sent out to preach the gospel. And Paul had done that all over, including on the island of Crete. And now in our text Paul, as God’s apostle, is appointing others to serve in his place while he moves on to the next. He says to Titus, **“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.” (1:5)**

Now Crete was kind of a rough place. It was an island in the Mediterranean Sea off the southern coast of Greece, so at one time, it had been a center for piracy, and it seems to have kept up its less than stellar reputation. Paul quotes one of Crete’s own people who described them this way, **“Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’ This saying is true.” (1:12).** Now maybe we don’t fancy to think of ourselves in those exact same terms, but before we look down our nose at those Cretans, maybe it doesn’t hurt to remember the reputation our own beloved state of Wisconsin has. We’re pretty much number one in the nation for drinking—not necessarily the best thing to be ranked #1 for. Anyway, it was quite the assignment that Titus was getting, to keep ministry efforts going and appoint new overseers and pastors in a place that was kind of rough around the edges and probably didn’t have too many long-time, mature in the faith, church members. It would be intimidating for Titus to pick a new crop of ministers to launch into their work.

Imagine it with me, Titus or one of those new pastors sitting down with one of the flock who’d been straying. There’s a conversation that needs to be had. It’s not the kind of conversation that’s going to be comfortable. It’s a conversation that probably neither of them of been looking forward to, but to some degree it’s probably been looming in their minds. As the two meet, the pastor opens up his Bible, he begins to point out some things in it, and some things in the life of the person in front of him—a dangerous lack of godly priorities and honesty, a relationship with God or a loved one that needs serious attention, a heart that needs change—all things which he can tell by tension in the room are unwelcome intrusions. The look on the person’s face seems to be the window into what they’re really thinking, “I don’t have to listen to this. *What gives him the right to say this to me?*” However lacking the attitude is, it’s still an important question with an important answer.

Little did that person know, the pastor had spent the last hour before their meeting sweating over the same question, “What gives me the right?” You see, as he prepares to point out things in the life of the person that will sit across from him, he remembers glimpses of thoughts, words, and actions from his own life that maybe aren’t the exact same, but don’t live up to the words that are supposed to describe him—blameless, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. Those glimpses of guilt whisper the word “hypocrite” into his mind and as that word resounds, it brings him to the same question, *“What gives me the right to say what I’m about to say to this person?”*

Well, what’s the answer? That as a pastor, he’s automatically holier than thou? No, he’s cut from the same sinful cloth. Yet God has given him the right through the call of His Church to watch over the flock of God of which the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer. God has given him a solemn charge to **“encourage and rebuke will all authority” (2:15)** and to **“encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (1:9).** Neither Paul nor Titus, nor any of those new pastors, nor Amos from our first lesson, nor any of your pastors here can shy away from obeying that charge to say what God wants said. Actually, if they do hold back, God says he will hold his watchmen partially responsible for the demise of his people. So in simple answer to the question,

“What gives him the right?” God gives him the right to talk to you about your life and what the word of God says about it. **1) God’s servants are sent with his own authority.**

Now all of our sinful natures bristle at the thought of anyone in authority over us, as humanity’s proud poem resounds in our hearts, “*I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.*” (Invictus, William Ernest Henley). Yet dear Christian, you must crucify that thought, for you do not belong to the world, nor do you belong to yourself, and this is why you must believe that it is a good thing that God has given servants in authority over you. It is for your good. The Lord Jesus sent Paul as an apostle “**to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—resting on the hope of eternal life.**” (1:2 NIV 84)

God has blessed you with servants to bless your faith, to teach and broaden and deepen in you the truths that make you wise for salvation. God has entrusted the task of preaching to preachers in your life to bring the truth of the gospel to light and to bring it to your heart. To teach you what it means that you were chosen before the creation of the world. And to teach you that now “**when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**” (Titus 3:4-7).

It is God’s love for you that has caused him to establish the public ministry to bless you and 2) *to further the faith of God’s elect.* To drive home this point, I’ll illustrate it the way I do for my catechism students. Envision a school day where there were no teachers, no pastors, no adults in charge whatsoever. All the kids were simply dropped off to the building where all the books and resources were, but everybody was totally on their own, a year of self-directed study, left to their own will and schedule. Recess all day if you want it, just as long as you know what you need to know to pass the end of the year exam. For a few seconds, their eyes light up as they treasure the thought of complete freedom, no one in authority, but soon realize how little learning or knowledge or progress would be acquired after a year of recess with no leaders.

“Eat. Drink, Play!” appears an enticing philosophy, but fails to deliver when we realize this is our one and only time of grace. Now is the time during which God calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies us in the one true faith through the work of his Spirit, whom has been poured out on his church, and on the public ministry. So God sends his servants with his authority with this goal in mind above all **2) to further the faith of his elect, which rests on the hope of eternal life.**

Finally, today we have one more truth to appreciate about the way God has established the ministry that serves on his behalf. His servants are also sent to further their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. God’s servants apply law and gospel, they point out sin and rebuke it, and forgive it when it’s repented of. They preach that “**the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. [The grace which] teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that his very own, eager to do what is good.**” (Titus 3:11-13)

Because they represent God and teach people to live godly lives, God expects them **3) to be examples of godliness themselves.** Thus he has established the qualifications of their character and living, and that they hold fast to the message so that they represent him well, and so they are not open to the charge of being hypocrites who don’t practice what they preach. He calls them to the high standards so that they are easy for you to obey and emulate. Those standards were the majority of our text today—blameless, faithful to his wife, not given to drunkenness or a temper, upright, holy, disciplined...

Applied with perfect strictness, no minister vetted by this list is able to stand before God. I won't lie to you; it was kind of a tough week reading over these qualifications over and over again thinking about all the ways I fall short of them. Every minister must confess with Isaiah to being a man of unclean lips. Only Jesus Christ, our Great High priest who is holy and blameless and set apart from sinners can stand before God as the true mediator of the New Covenant. Before we close today, you have to see what our great high priest Jesus does!

I don't know of any better picture of this than from the Old Testament, from a vision in the book of Zechariah. The vision has a high priest named Joshua standing before the Angel of the LORD, who is the 2nd person of the Trinity in the Old Testament, and Satan is standing right at his side accusing Joshua. Satan thinks he gets to have a field day with Joshua, pointing at his filthy clothes, accusing him in front of the LORD. Do you know what the LORD does? He rebukes Satan and says this man has been snatched from the fire. Then tells the angels to take off Joshua's filthy clothes and the LORD looks at Joshua and he says, **"See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."** (Zechariah 3:4). And he puts a clean turban on his head and clean garments on his body, and he charges him once again to be his high priest.

This is a picture of what Paul means when he says. **"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant."** (2 Cor. 3:5,6). God gives strength to his imperfect servants to be examples of godliness and live according to the word they profess. Praise be to God that he has given the gift of competence to his ministers and given the gift of competent ministers to his people. Amen.