

Two weeks ago we started to explore the first of Paul’s two letters to Timothy, his “true child in the faith”.

The letter started with Paul reminding Timothy to live the “Resurrection Life”, found in the good news of Jesus Christ, which has been entrusted to them. It was the week after Easter, and appropriate time to reflect on “being Christian”, asking ourselves, *If we are “christian”, can Christ be seen in our lives?, and if He is seen, have we given over control to the Holy Spirit, to direct our lives and accomplish God’s plan on earth?*

Last Sunday, Philip jumped ahead to Paul’s second letter to Timothy, offering him four metaphors to encourage him: to be a faithful **teacher**, an obedient **soldier**, an **athlete** who competes by the rules, and **farmer** who works hard and enjoys the fruit of his labour.¹

The starting point of the life of a Christian, the journey of being a Christian, starts with ourselves. God has to do His work **in** us, before He trusts us to work **through** us, which is why a personal relationship with God our Father is both, important and essential.

So, before Paul gives Timothy instruction and advice concerning the whole church, he wants to make sure Timothy understand, it is the work God has done **in** Him, which gives him strength and wisdom to be a leader in the Church at Ephesus, to handle the problems in the Church.

So Paul offers himself as the example. People in positions of power and authority **tend** to talk about themselves in grandiose terms, about what they have done, and the significance and importance of their work. The saying, *It is lonely at the top*, is perhaps the reason why, people who make it to the top, talk to themselves, about themselves.

¹ 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Paul is all too aware of this trap. An aristocratic Jew, from a well to do family, and hobnobbing with the powerful religious elite; bragging about himself and his achievements, would have come easily to Paul.

His dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus when Jesus the Christ spoke to him, *Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?*, would have only added to his self importance, and given him greater reason to show-off.

The letter to Timothy is not the first time Paul gives his testimony. His letter to the church at Philippi² and his second letter to the church at Corinth³, Paul mentions his past life, but he is very conscious to give glory to God and credit to Christ for his life. Paul is only too aware of the pitfall of pride, and makes every effort to make sure people understand his dependence on the work of Christ in him: *“the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*⁴

Paul reminisces to Timothy on his earlier life, when he was a passionate Jew, fanatical about observing Jewish tradition and preserving Jewish heritage. He thought Jesus was destroying Jewish culture; so he went after anyone who supported Jesus, anyone who bought into the idea of Jesus as the Messiah. These people had no right to live, and had to be destroyed.

God’s ways are strange ways. We might wonder why God chose Paul, “a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent”⁵ as he describes himself. Surely God could have found a person with an impeccable, unblemished and flawless background, who would not have to fight to establish his credentials.

² Philippians 3:4-11

³ 2 Corinthians 10:12

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:14

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:13

But God saw in Paul something we would have never seen in him. God saw Paul's sincere, single-minded passion to preserve the Jewish way of life; so God said, *Let's channel this negative energy into a positive, dynamic force, to preserve both the Jews and the followers of Christ, to be saved into the eternal kingdom of God.*

Starting with Paul's dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, God starts to work in him, to mould and shape him into the person whose heart would reflect God's heart, who would desire to accomplish God's every command, who would learn to be dependent on the power and wisdom of God, and not his own.

Writing to Timothy, Paul twice mentions, "I received mercy...". To receive God's *mercy*, is to be spared God's extreme anger, by His love; to be spared punishment by God that I deserve, for the pain and suffering my actions have caused Him, because His love for me is so great. This is true mercy.

The first time Paul says he received God's mercy because he had acted in ignorance. Our courts tell us, *ignorance of the law is no excuse for breaking it*, but Paul tells us, God's love for us is so great, when we break His law out of ignorance, He will not let us suffer what we deserve. This is the only kind of *mercy* there is.

The second time Paul says he received God's mercy was when Christ Himself uses Paul as an example of His endless patience, to those who sitting on the fence, wavering whether to trust Christ's promise of eternal life. To them God says, *I waited for Paul; I will wait for you!* This too is *mercy!*

God was at work **in** Paul, instructing him, giving him His wisdom, teaching him the correct way to think and act, and as Paul changed and accepted

God’s way forward, God started working through him by trusting him to proclaim the gospel message of Jesus the Christ.

A man who has every reason to speak to Timothy with confidence and pride of his family status, his Roman citizenship, his education, his eldership in the religious hierarchy, Paul says instead, *I thank Him who has given me strength, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service.*⁶

Having placed his life on record, Paul turns to Timothy his *son* in faith, whom he has fed and nurtured and reminds him of the time when they started out together⁷, the leaders of his church prayed for him, and God gave them words of prophecy, that Timothy faithfully teach Truth, and be strong and have strength to stop false teachers.

Through Paul’s continued mentoring, God has been doing His work **in** Timothy, and Timothy is now ready for God to work **through** him in Ephesus.

Paul now reveals to Timothy, what he must do for God to work **through** him: *make every effort to make sure that nothing obstructs your faith in the work of God, which leads to a conscience conditioned by God.*

Those who have let their faith in God slip away from them, have had their conscience mislead them. Paul cites the example of two men: Hymenaeus and Alexander.

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, we learn of Hymenaeus who had become a false teacher⁸ and Alexander might be the man in Ephesus, who made objects (idols?) from copper, who caused Paul a lot of trouble⁹.

⁶ 1 Timothy 1:12

⁷ Acts 16:3

⁸ 2 Timothy 2:17

⁹ 2 Timothy 4:14

Both had allowed their faith in God to slip away and their conscience led them to blaspheme against God.

We live in a world which wants to take credit for every-thing good, and blame God everything bad. We don't want to take responsibility for our own actions which causes harm to others, and words which damage and cause pain.

In this post-Easter period, before we celebrate the Pentecost, we are preparing to "live" the gospel life, to live our lives by the mercy of God, in the grace of God, and bathed by the love of God, but it is at the cross of Jesus Christ, that God's mercy, His grace and His love come together in one expression of sacrifice.

When Paul boasts of his life, he is expressing pride in being chosen by Christ to be part of the work of God on earth.

Each of us here today, can claim the same pride: our background, our past, our education, all that we think makes us who we are, is not relevant when it comes to being a Christian.

Three questions we need to address this morning:

1. Is God at work **in** you, shaping you, conditioning your conscience to the things that are important in the work of God on earth?
2. If He is, what are you doing to guard and protect your faith, that it will not slip away from you, and lead you into areas of false understanding of the Christian life?
3. Finally, God wants to work **through** you, to bless those around you, with a greater and deeper knowledge of Himself. Will you let Him?

AMEN