

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 15, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (NIV 84)

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. 13) Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14) The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15) **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--**of whom I am the worst. 16) But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 17) Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Children love to play pretend. And often as they play pretend they try to copy the actions of others perhaps with their own twist. If a little girl knows that her mommy has an appointment or an activity scheduled for later in the day, the little girl might plan her own activity. She'll get all dressed up and ready to go to her pretend appointment. Sometimes young children will tell you all about what they learned in school – even though they're not in school yet.

As we grow older we may leave behind our imaginary appointments and activities but we still enjoy pretending with a different twist. Teens often pick out a role model and try to be just like they are. Some people continue doing that even as adults – trying to emulate or copy the example of someone whom they respect. Some people get so engrossed in a TV series or in the novels that they read that they begin to imagine that they are just like one of the characters.

I wonder if that that ever happens as we read through our Bibles – do we ever begin to imagine that if we had been living in Biblical times that we would have been like one of the people we read about in the Bible? Do we perhaps have a Biblical hero that serves as a role model for us? Take a minute and think about some of the individuals in the Bible – which one is your favorite? Which one is most like you? Which one would you like to be more like?

Do you identify with Job who was asked to undergo great suffering? Do you see yourself as a mighty warrior like David? Maybe you see a little bit of yourself in Peter who often went full speed ahead without thinking? Or are you a little bit more like the apostle John who seems to be a bit more cautious and reserved? Maybe you can really relate to Martha who appears to always have been busy with something?

What about Paul? Is he one of your favorites? Would you like to be more like him? As we think about our text for today it is my prayer that we will all come to realize that we have a great deal in common with Paul and that we will be encouraged to strive to be more like Paul.

Theme: Like Paul, We have been Shown Mercy

1. Together with Paul we have the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life
2. Together with Paul we have been appointed to serve the Lord
3. Together with Paul we will praise the Lord

It's always good for us to consider a bit of the background when we are trying to understand a particular portion of God's Word. Today's text is a portion of a letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to one of his younger co-workers – a young man by the name of Timothy. The two individuals had known each other for over a dozen years but there was no doubt that Timothy could still learn much from Paul the veteran missionary. At the time this letter was written Paul had left Timothy alone in Ephesus to care for that congregation. As a part of his work there Timothy had to encounter false teachers who were beginning to cause trouble for the church. Paul's letter was intended to encourage Timothy for his challenging work.

He did that by reminding Timothy of the mercy that the Lord Jesus had shown to both of them. As we live our lives for the Lord we also encounter challenges. We can also be encouraged by the mercy the Lord has shown to us.

Like Paul (and Timothy), we have been shown mercy. Together with Paul we have the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. We can say with Paul: **14) The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.**

These words come from the middle of our text but I wanted to talk about them first because they are really the high point of this text. These words explain why we, like Paul and Timothy, have been appointed to serve the Lord. These words provide the reason for praising the Lord together with Paul.

The writer of the hymn, *Amazing Grace*, surely must have had in mind the words of this text as he wrote his hymn – Paul surely was an object of the Lord's grace. In the verse before this section of our text Paul confessed some of his sins: **"I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man"**, he wrote. Obviously those sins and others weighed heavy on his conscience. He calls himself the worst of sinners. The sins of his youth had been forgiven but Paul had never forgotten them. He cites them as evidence of the great mercy of God and the forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus.

Paul pictures the grace our Lord as a liquid being poured into a cup until it overflows – Paul reminded the Romans (Romans 5:20) **where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.** (KJV)

No matter how full of sin our lives might have been or might be God's grace is sufficient to flush those sins away and to replace them with his forgiveness. The well of God's grace will never run dry even though it fills the cups of a world full of sinners to overflowing. That's the Amazing grace of God – a grace that sacrificed his only Son for our sins, as numerous as they are, a grace that willingly and lovingly laid down his life for our sins, as numerous as they are...a grace that called us to faith in our Savior Jesus who came into this world to save sinners – one and all unworthy as any of us may be. This is the grace of God that he wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Together with grace the Lord poured out his faith and love on us. By grace we like Paul have been filled with faith which relies on our Savior God for the forgiveness of sins and trusts his promise of eternal life. By grace we have been filled with a love like our Savior's love that desires to serve our heavenly Father and his creation.

But can we be sure of this grace? Can it really be true that God will deal with us in the same way he dealt with Paul? Are we perhaps dreaming when we think that we have been shown mercy like Paul – and that like him we have the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

Listen to what the Lord inspired Paul to write and believe! **15) Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 16)**

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Here's something you can count on and depend on – Jesus came to save sinners. And here's evidence of the fact Paul, says. I was the worst of sinners who tried to destroy believers and to wipe out the saving name of Jesus. And yet I was shown mercy so that the unlimited patience of Christ might serve as an example of his forgiving love to others who will believe on him and receive eternal life.

On the basis of this trustworthy saying the Holy Spirit leads us to conclude that we are indeed like Paul. God's mercy is for us. The forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life is for us. And like Paul we too have been appointed to serve the Lord.

Paul began his words of encouragement to Timothy this way: **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.** Sometimes when our service to the Lord seems especially challenging, we might be tempted to throw in the towel and call it quits due to our own unworthiness and our own weaknesses. Paul's words remind us to look away from ourselves and to look toward Christ – he's the one who enables us to do everything. Our competence for service to the Lord comes from him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light so that we might declare his praises.

You and I might question our worthiness to serve the Lord. Paul also as we have seen was fully aware of his unworthiness. Remember what he said about himself: **Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.** The one who described himself as the chief of sinners had been counted faithful by the Lord who appointed him to serve. So how could Paul do anything but thank him with his service? The same is true of us. Although all of our righteous acts are as filthy rags, none the less our Lord says to us: (Isaiah 1:18) **"Come now, let us reason together," ... "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.**

Like the Apostle Paul we often are ignorant of our own sins and acts of unbelief. We say this not to make excuses but to amplify the grace of the Lord Jesus who prayed for those who drove the nails through his hands – **Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.** That prayer may have been prompted by the soldiers and their nails but we know that it was for our sins that he died – our sins of ignorance and unbelief.

It has to amaze us, as it did Paul, that the Lord in his mercy allows us the privilege of serving him but that is exactly what the Scriptures teach. In fact not only are we allowed the privilege but we are even built up and equipped for task through the pastors and teachers the Lord has given us. Paul reminded the Ephesians **that it is the Lord Jesus who some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service.** (Eph 4:11-12) To each of us grace has been given as Christ sees fit. To each Christian the Holy Spirit gives gifts to be used for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

We have not all been called or appointed to serve in the same capacity. We have been given different gifts and different positions in life. But no matter what our position is we are to do everything to the glory of God. Paul rejoiced that he was given the privilege of serving the Lord. He was encouraging Timothy to do the same as he looked to the Lord for strength.

When Paul considered the wonderful evidences of God's grace in his life; that he been appointed to serve, that he had the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life; he could not help but burst into words of praise: **Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.**

Is there any reason why we will not praise the Lord together with the Apostle Paul? Think of the reasons we have to praise him. Reflect again that trustworthy saying: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** *The eternal son of God-- the promised one who was born of the virgin Mary and given the name Jesus because he will save his people their sins was sent by his Father and gladly left behind the glory that was his to become one of us and to live under God's law for us. He was tempted in every way just like us but was obedient even to the point of giving his life on the cross for the sinners he came to seek and to save.* What a glorious message this is. How can we hear it without saying Praise God!

As Paul contemplated this boundless mercy which he experienced in Jesus and the patient love future believers can expect he couldn't help but give him praise. God is eternal and he is to be praised for that. God is invisible to our eyes but his saving grace is evident in our lives. He is to be praised for that. He is the only God – (Acts 4:12) **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** And for that he is to be praised. To him belongs honor and glory forever and ever.

Through the blood and righteousness of Christ, we like Paul, will live forever. In faith let us cling to him alone saying: Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Such a faith honors and glorifies **the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.** And with such a faith we will honor and glory to **the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God forever and ever** just like Paul.

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