

**Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost – October 23, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

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

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8) Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. ... 16) At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17) But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18) **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

Fellow Christians;

There's a line of greeting cards and products called *Forever Friends* that features drawings of cute little bears. The cards are a popular way of sending messages of love, friendship, and warm sentiment. At one time, the cards were called "hugs in an envelope." I have to admit the little bears are kind of irresistible. Maybe someone has cared enough to send you one of those warm-fuzzy cards. Perhaps you've been blessed to have a special friendship or relationship with someone whom you'd call your "Forever Friend" – someone who has shared the ups and downs of life with you, someone who had stood by you and helped you in time of need, someone who promises to always be your friend. Unfortunately, those friendships can only last for a lifetime – our earthly friends can't assure us of the ultimate victory.

The Psalmist teaches us: **Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. 5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God. ... 10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.** (Psalm 146:3-5, 10 NIV)

Our text for today doesn't necessarily make us feel warm and fuzzy when we first read it or hear it. But it speaks of the one and only "*Forever Friend*" that we need. Praise the Lord ...

**Theme:** The Lord Will be With Us to the End

1. Through all the trials of life
2. With his power so we can overcome
3. To assure us of the ultimate victory

Paul's Second Letter to Timothy was one of his last letters. He was imprisoned in Rome under Emperor Nero – chained and in a dungeon. He was fully aware that the end of life was drawing near. Alone with his thoughts he had plenty of time to think, to reflect and ponder upon his life and the many trials he had faced because of the Lord Jesus. He was also able to ponder the power of the Lord Jesus and the strength the Lord had given him to fight the good fight of faith as he proclaimed the message of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection to the Gentiles. He was eagerly looking forward to his final moments in this world and to receiving the crown of righteousness that the Lord had in store for him in the safety of his heavenly kingdom.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to share some of his thoughts and contemplations with Timothy and us as an encouragement to remain faithful to the Word of the Lord as we serve him with the confident expectation of enjoying eternal security in heaven.

Let's reflect on what Paul wrote concerning the fact that the Lord was with him through all the trials of his life. **For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith... At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17) But the Lord stood at my side...**

In his letter to the Romans, Paul urges, **"in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."** (Romans 12:1 NIV) Those words encourage us to use our talents, strengths, and abilities in service to the Lord. Paul's life is an example. He sacrificed himself to share the Gospel with the Gentile world. He endured hardship and persecution. Even when he was in chains – he rejoiced that the Gospel was not chained.

Now as Paul's life was nearing its end he speaks of being poured out like a drink offering. The drink offering was the final part of the Old Testament sacrificial offerings. He had not stood on the sidelines cheering; he was an active participant in the good fight. He did not fight for wealth or personal gain or earthly fame. He fought to win the souls of men for Christ as a faithful messenger of the Gospel. Now the competition is over. He has finished the race and crossed the finished line. The work the Lord had planned for him was finished. He has kept the faith – he has hung on to the Gospel that God gave him to believe and proclaim. By God's grace, he has competed. The race was over and he had won.

The Lord was with him to end through all the trials of his life. Paul wanted Timothy to understand that the Lord would also be with him through all the trials of his life. And that is what the Holy Spirit wants us to understand as we contemplate Paul's words. The Lord will not abandon his own. Paul's earthly companions did not or could not support him during his court appearances and trial in Rome. He had no one pleading his case for him – no one of wealth or standing to ask the charge to drop the charges against him. No one was willing to risk their lives for Paul's sake. Everyone had deserted him but Paul did not hold it against them. He rejoiced that the Lord stood at his side.

In the book of Proverbs, wise King Solomon encourages us to rely on the Lord's wisdom and promises that those who do so will be able to rely on the Lord to be at their side and to keep their feet from becoming ensnared and entangled in evil. (Cf. Proverbs 3:21 ff.)

The challenges and trails that confront us in life make take many forms. At times, our friends and family may be right there with us standing at our side. However, the time may come when it seems as if we've been abandoned – that no one cares or understands the troubles and trails that are confronting us. Dear friends do not despair the Lord knows and the Lord cares! The Psalmist expressed this confidence. **Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.** (Psalm 27:10 NIV) **God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** (Hebrews 13:5 NIV) The Lord will be there with us to the end through all the trials of life. We have his word on it! The Lord will also be there with his power so we can overcome. The Apostle Paul expressed that confidence in this way. **But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.**

The omnipresent (always present) Lord was with Paul with his powerful, gracious helping presence to give Paul the strength to serve his as a faithful spokesman of the Gospel. With strength that the Lord gave him the message of the forgiveness of sins won by Christ with his perfect live and innocent death and guaranteed by his resurrection from the dead rang forth to the Gentile nations.

Paul, the courageous Christian missionary, had to overcome the same challenges that our sinful flesh poses to us when it comes to letting our lights shine as witness for Christ. The same fears that often compel us

to remain quite rather than to speak of Christ confronted Paul. At times like that – such as when he was in his prison cell facing the prospect of death Paul knew that he could go to the Lord for strength. The Lord opened his eyes to see the opportunities that lay before him and with his promises empowered Paul to courageously speak.

In a sense Paul was a bit of celebrity – he was a well-known Christian leader. The emperor Nero wanted to make an example of Paul as he sought to convince people that Christians were dangerous to the empire. At his trial – the courtroom would be filled with important people, the first century media hounds and the curiosity seekers. There was no TV, no internet, no Twitter – but the word would get around fast enough. Did Paul rant and rave to defend himself? No, Paul proclaimed the Gospel and took his stand on the truth with the strength that the Lord provided to him. We don't know if any believed but we do know that Paul was not immediately convicted at his first trial. The Lord spared his life.

The Lord also strengthens us to overcome our own sinful tendencies and weaknesses. We can do all things through him who gives us strength. (Cf. Philippians 4:13) With his power we can overcome and conquer our fears. We can openly confess our faith with lives that call attention to our devotion to the Lord. We can take a stand on the truth of the Gospel – we can tell others of the love of Jesus

The fact that the Lord delivered Paul from the lions mouth is a powerful reminder that the Lord will be with us to the end to assure us of the ultimate victory. Following his first trial in Nero's court Paul was returned to his prison chamber – this temporary deliverance reminded Paul of the eternal victory that was his in Christ. **Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**

We heard Paul speak of fighting the good fight and finishing the race. Paul now speaks of the trophy that awaits him – the crown or wreath of righteousness. Although you and I might envision a kingly crown when we hear these words Paul was thinking of the Laurel wreath that was given to the athletes of his day. The victors crown was waiting for him. Christ's righteousness enables him to stand victorious before the Lord to claim an everlasting crown. The Lord will award this crown to him and to all those who in faith long for the appearance of the Lord Jesus who has won the victory for them and credits them with his righteousness.

This crown becomes even more amazing to us when we understand our own sins and God's demand for a holiness and righteousness that we cannot provide because our sins separate us from him. Those sins demanded punishment. Christ provided deliverance from that punishment. God presented Christ as the sacrifice that turned God's wrath away from us. Christ was punished in our place – we are justified (declared not guilty) for his sake. His punishment secured the victor's crown for us. (Cf. Romans 6:20-26) Now there is in store for us a crown of life. The Lord will be with us to assure us of the ultimate victory

The Lord has stood beside Paul in his trials and strengthened him. Paul did not know what evils awaited him but he had this confidence: **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.**

We don't know what the future holds for us either. We don't know what threats and dangers we might face before we will be poured out like a drink offering before the Lord. But we too, have this confidence: **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.** God has promised us a place in his heavenly kingdom – a place where there is no more crying, mourning, pain, or death (Cf. Revelation 21:4). A place where there are no more wars but only peace, joy, contentment and everlasting happiness in the presence of the Lord. **To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen!**