

## Sermon Theme: Be Strong Passing Along the Good News

### Sermon Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-10, 2:1-2

It was a beautiful summer night late July. They watched the fireworks and were headed to the street dance down on Main Street. The group split up with a couple heading off to dance and another to go find some food leaving just the two of them. It had been an interesting summer. They had been decent friends for the past few years, but things had started to change a little bit. That summer they had started talking a lot more and things were starting to look a bit more serious between them. It really wasn't too surprising then that he couldn't stop his stomach from doing those weird flips. For some reason his hands wouldn't stop shaking or be less clammy. He was pretty sure she could see his heart pounding through his shirt. What if she does say, "Yes"? What if she says, "No"? Nervously he takes her hand and asks that question, "Do you want to go out with me?"

Maybe this helps us think a little bit differently about what goes into sharing the message of Jesus or inviting someone to church. It can be little more than asking a question requiring less commitment than asking someone out on a date. And still one can be left with a stomach flipping, hand shaking, stumbling for word situation. On Mission Sundays we tend to look out abroad to distant lands and the incredible work down *over there* or to the cool, neat work that is being done in other communities. But what about here? Have we lost sight of the work of spreading and sharing Jesus here in Valentine and the surrounding area?

Before you start rolling your eyes thinking, "Here we go again..." think about what gets in the way for you personally to share the invitation. The excuses come easily and they make sense to us. Maybe you feel someone else is better suited for doing those things. One might feel like they lost before they even begin so that when they hear that, "No," to the invitation or message it's a self-fulfilled prophecy that we are all too willing to point out, "See, I told you it wouldn't work." Maybe you were burned too many times in the past. Maybe you were expecting to see more results and simply didn't. Maybe you still have that zeal and desire, want to do it, but are having trouble getting over that edge to speak out and ask the question. Today, stop looking to yourself and fix your eyes on the one who gives us the strength to pass along the good news.

Paul is writing to Pastor Timothy from prison and he knows he is about to die. But before he dies he sends this letter, what we call 2 Timothy, as a sort of last will and testament for Timothy and us. Paul says in v.8, "**Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner.**" Paul knows the temptation to be ashamed is very real and very much present because he understands the situation. Think about how your parents were probably anything but proud of you when you got into trouble in school. No one is driving around with the bumper sticker: "My child is the one always in detention." Now think of

how one might react with someone in prison. Not very many people would be standing up, proud and promoting an individual whose way of life and teaching landed them in prison and on the executioner's block. It's easy to promote a group when they are the popular ones, when they are being celebrated, when it seems like they are winning at life and successful. But Paul and the Christians looked like a bunch of losers.

Then there's the message that they were proclaiming. It was foolish! From an outside observer it looked like a seemingly random Jew was so hated by his own people that they had him nailed to a cross as a criminal by the Roman Empire. That supposed criminal is the one these Christians proclaimed to follow. In fact, they claimed that this Jesus guy came back to life and because he did all the things you have done wrong were taken away free of charge. Are you kidding me!?!? Not just losers, but they sound crazy.

It's really not all that surprising for someone to feel the temptation to be ashamed. Think about you deal with today. In today's society it's no longer as acceptable or promoted to be a Christian. Maybe it's still okay to *say* that you are a Christian; but to follow God's Word, to uphold its teachings, to live like one is a different story. You know how it can be difficult to stand up for the truth of God's Word especially when the truth is unpopular and it's to a family member or friend.

But why is it that we conveniently never see that opportunity to invite that delinquent member? Why can it be so easy to see it as someone else's responsibility to talk to them? Why is it that we feel so nervous, so awkward, and uncomfortable in that situation?

I think a big reason is because we are afraid of what the response is going to be. Like the young man asking out the girl—either consciously or subconsciously—you know that there is going to be a change in your relationship with this individual. Once those words are spoken, there's no going back. Things are going to be different and change and we don't know if we are willing or going to like it. So the devil works to convince you and me that it is not in our best interest to promote God's Word. What if someone asks you a question you can't answer? Then you might look foolish. What if they say, "Yes"? Will you be able to impress them when they come? Will the church embarrass me? Will another person say or do something that will end up hurting my relationship? What if they say, "No"? How much shame can you handle?

Paul doesn't answer those questions. Instead he says, don't be ashamed and, **"Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."** Instead of distancing yourself and being ashamed, join together. Joys are doubled and sorrows are halved when we are joined together in Christian fellowship. By the power of God working through that gospel we will endure and not be ashamed because God has saved you and called you. These are accomplished facts. By his power God has saved you from certain doom and eternal suffering in hell. His clear voice resounding through the Gospel calls you who were blind

and lost in sin and unbelief to see the light of Jesus and be found with faith. He has called you to a holy life: you have been set apart from this world, you are **God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of that darkness** (1 Peter 2:9).

But how can this be? Don't worry; this didn't have come from you. Paul says in v.9, **He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have but because of his own purpose and grace.** It makes more sense that God would want nothing to do with us who are too often ashamed or afraid of speaking or sharing his message because it might hurt our status or reputation with others. Instead, God called you according to God's plan and God's grace given to you in Jesus before the beginning of time. It really shows the infinite and unsearchable wisdom of God, how thoroughly and completely Jesus' forgiveness is—even the times when we have been ashamed, those are forgiven too!—the incredible undeserving and patient love that God chooses to save and call you knowing full well all that we would do. And it's all yours because Jesus has destroyed death abolishing it once and for all time with his perfect life and innocent death on the cross. Temporal death, when we leave this world, it has lost its power—God's people merely fall asleep in Jesus' name to be awakened with him in heaven. Eternal death and separation from God has lost its terror for believers because Jesus has made it known to us and brought life and immortality to light! It's not hidden by the darkness of sin, but the light of Jesus shines to show us the way, the truth, and the life.

But this work of Jesus, God's plan and purpose, his grace is of no value to people unless it is shared: it is made known **through the Gospel.** And the good news is that we don't have to wait for something else to come along or wonder if there is going to be another revelation in the future. The same gospel we know is the same gospel we share. And we share it not because we need more people sitting in the pews. Lord willing, that is the result but, first and foremost, it's about sharing the good news of Jesus that all our wrongs have been paid for by him. It's not about impressing someone with our church or different programs we have or making excuses/apologizing for the ones we don't have. It's about revealing that Jesus destroyed death and gives us life in him. It's not about having all the answers to the questions; you never will. Instead point to the Word where we find Jesus and can search for answers with them.

Paul knows well the struggles of being a Christian and the suffering that comes with it. And so he encourages us in 2:1, **“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”**

This “being strong” isn't something where you do it once and that's all. It's not like you get baptized to start it off, get a quick pick-me-up and refresher around confirmation age, and then hope it carries you through for the majority of life with the occasional refills on the way. No, Paul is saying “be strong” continually. Paul knows how it is for the life of a

Christian how it ebbs and flows: some days you feel really strong and able to take on the world. Other days you feel weak. You fall into that same sin...again. You don't promote your faith with sharing it or living it. We continually need and want to be strengthened in Jesus' grace. We don't just eat one meal on Sunday and then expect that one meal to give us strength for the rest of the week. We continue to eat. We want to continually eat God's Word and grow in that grace. And the more that we are in God's Word, the more we continue to grow in Jesus' love, the more your faith is strengthened and it results in us wanting to share that love.

Paul encouraged Timothy to continue to encourage and teach others. So it is with the church today. The public called workers assist God's people so that they may grow. God's people then take what they have learned and have the opportunity to share it with others. All of God's people have the good news, so now what are you going to do with it? Teach others with continuing to be in worship and go to Bible Study making the most of those opportunities. You teach with how you live and your attitude when it comes to gathering with God's people and his Word. Children especially see and learn more from the impressions you give and the attitude you have than from the action itself. You support the teaching with the offerings you put in the plate and the prayers that you speak. You do this as parents making sure that your children grow up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Think about your position in life and the calling God has given to you. Ask yourself, "How can I share the Good News of Jesus? How can I support this work? Who do I know that could use a little extra encouragement?"

Think about what Jesus has done for you: he has destroyed death—it has no power here for God's people. You were blinded in the darkness of sin and now have the light of the Gospel in your heart and mind. You have peace with God that surpasses understanding. You have a Savior who pronounces that all your sins are forgiven. And it's all yours because of the faith that God created by the preaching and teaching of his Word. All by God's plan and grace. And it's this grace that gives you the strength to pass along the good news.

Stay connected to that Word and Lord's Supper so you continue to grow and be strengthened. Yes, it can be difficult to share the Good News. Sometimes it's really hard to get over that hump and speak the words. But what might be the surprising truth is that for many people—even when they know they could come on their own—they are waiting for that personal invitation. Maybe God is giving you another opportunity to live your faith. So I encourage you today to be mindful this week, encouraged and strengthened with Jesus' grace, look for the opportunities to share Jesus' love and ask that hard question, "Would you like to come to church with me?" Amen.