

SERMON- Feast of St. Timothy

Charles R. Cowherd

1 Timothy 4.4-16

Psalm 112:1-9

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

January 28, 2024

John 10:1-10

OPENING:

Today, I am wearing red and the sanctuary is decorated in red, because we are celebrating the Feast of St. Timothy, Companion of Paul, recipient of the Letter(s) to Timothy.

It's because Timothy would meet his end in bloody martyrdom as Bishop of Ephesus in the late 1st century, we wear red in his honor.

Later on today, I will wear a *blazer*.

I do so as a clergy person only on two occasions: at funerals and at the Annual Meeting.

Today is not a funeral, and I will wear my blazer, so it must be the day of our Annual Meeting.

Now the passage we just heard is famous one. often read at funerals, in fact that passage from John is probably the reading from the Bible that I have preached the most in of all Scripture, because it's a choice to be used at funerals and because I used to serve at a church called the Church of the Good Shepherd.

But I am not going to preach on that passage today, because today is not a funeral.

There is one more connection between Annual Meetings and funerals, besides the aforementioned blazer and the fried chicken lunch we will all eat together...

This connection comes from a sermon I preached on Easter Sunday 2022.

In that sermon, I cannot believe I said this, but I looked back and checked, I said that times had been tough here, to the point that some thought in the community and in the churches surrounding us, they thought that on Easter Sunday, you would find a dead body here at St. Timothy's.

That we were there to celebrate a funeral.

Not literally, mind you.

But figuratively, a betting man might have said that the Body of Christ, as expressed here at St. Timothy's in Herndon, Virginia, was not long for this world.

What I preached on that Easter Sunday was that instead there was a miracle, that instead of despair and grief that were to be found that day, there was the promise and hope of new life.

Just as the women who came to the tomb on the first Easter Sunday, they expected to find a dead body, they were ready to celebrate a funeral, but instead they got Resurrection.

Somehow that same sequence had played out here at St. Timothy's:
What was lost was found, what was put off for dead, has found new life.

ST. TIMOTHY'S:

So if you were one of those that went through all that,
or if you are new or visiting us this morning and have no idea what I am talking about,

I will say the same thing to you that I said on that Easter Sunday, that you have walked into a church that takes the Resurrection seriously, that our life here is essentially cruciform, cross-like in shape.

We have been through it, in all different ways and shapes and sizes, and we have come out on the other side.

In preaching that, I echo the words that Paul writes to St. Timothy in our Epistle reading that Ralph/ Rob read.

Paul is telling Timothy the same thing; and this applies to our church life, or to us in our families, and at work, and at play, and everywhere.

Keep the faith.

No matter what happens,

God has a plan for you,

you will "suffer reproach and hardship,"¹

but to keep at it.

Discipleship is hard, being the church is hard, and because of that you need to, in Paul's words: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers."²

TIMOTHY

Timothy, if you remember, was Paul's young protégé whom he sent all across the Mediterranean to do ministry in the 1st century...

Timothy needed the blazer,

he needed to grow his beard out, because his authority was often being questioned.

"Let no one despise your youth" Paul says to Timothy.³

And all throughout the New Testament, Timothy is messing up. He keeps falling,

¹ 1 Timothy 4.10a

² 1 Timothy 4.16

³ 1 Timothy 4.12a

but he picks himself up off the ground and keeps going.
He needed bucking up from God, and from Paul his patron.
Likewise, we need bucking up from Timothy, our patron, and from Paul, and from God.

TIMOTHY 2

It shouldn't surprise that Timothy is also the patron saint of Stomach ailments, in the next chapter of the letter, Paul tells him to "drink a little wine" to calm your stomach.⁴

That's a reminder that Timothy indeed knows what it's like to get it wrong. And a reminder that Paul also gets it wrong—not only about wine calming one's stomach—but about more important stuff.

For example, in the Letter to Timothy there are these objectionable sections about women and their role in church and what they should wear and what they should or should not say.

In our passage this morning, we just get a hint of it: the brief line about old wives tales.⁵ Turn to another page and you will find some interesting things about wearing bonnets and sexual promiscuity that sounds more than a bit sexist to our ears.

In all, 1st Timothy as a letter is a little bit all over the place, our 12 verses alone talk about old wives tales, talks about exercise, talks about reading scripture in public.

That's okay, St. Timothy is not the patron saint of perfection, not the patron saint of 1600 on your SATs, of being the best. He is the patron saint of *Pepto-Bismal*... of not getting it right but picking oneself off the mat and being saved by God.

Notice the first line of the reading, 1st Timothy 4.4.

"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer."

Here is the classic Anglican exposition on our theology of creation.

God created the world and it was good.

That means that our appropriate human response is not a miserly selection of God's

⁴ 1 Timothy 5.23

⁵ 1 Timothy 4.7a

gifts, as if humans possessed a superior moral discernment to God, but an open-hearted reception to them all.⁶

This means an embrace of life, a realization that it's fraught with highs and lows. Flawed people, flawed institutions but capable of great good.

When the Vestry was trying to come up with a Bible verse to put on our brochure, something for newcomers to connect this church with our patron and with God's redeeming message of love, they chose this one. Why?

Because it most succinctly and fully expresses our message of welcome and inclusivity for one another, for all those who work through those doors, and for all those out there.

If I have learned anything in the last almost 2 years, it's that message of welcome and hospitality and outreach that is so part of this church's DNA that it deserves to be proclaimed and included on the back of a brochure with this scriptural quotation.

Timothy and Paul get THAT part right, they stumble over themselves over the relationships between men and women, and the merits of exercise and diet, just as we do 2000 years later. But they knock the most important ones out of the park.

CONCLUSION

I still cannot believe that I said that on Easter Sunday, kids were present and it was my 3rd Sunday here all that, that people expected to find a dead body

But that's what the Christian life is all about this juxtaposition of the pain and sorrow and difficulty of life with the hope and love. It's a Christmas that is sad. It's funerals that are joyful.

Paul knew that, Timothy knew that.

I will close with this: there are only 39 St. Timothy's in the Episcopal Church, none other in the Diocese of Virginia,

I am on a quest to figure out why we chose that name, but I am thankful for it regardless. What a good model for who we are called to be.

In the next month, I am headed to this area right on the Fairfax/ Loudoun County line off Powell's Tavern Place, near Dranesville Elementary. There used to be something there called Sugarland chapel, an Anglican there is a graveyard there, it's off not looking for Dead bodies, not looking for a funeral. looking for life! I am looking to find why we are names St. Timothy's. What connects us in this deposit of faith.

AMEN

⁶ Johnson, Luke Timothy. 2001. *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*. (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 35A.) New York: Doubleday, 248.