

Sermon for Sunday October 6, 2013 8:15 am 2 Tim 1:1-14 "Quotidian Ministry"

I wonder what it would have been like for the apostles after Pentecost, after Christ's ascension to heaven, after the dust had settled. Once the shock had passed, once the drama was over, once they realized that something beyond understanding had happened, then they had to figure out how to do the work that Christ had bequeathed to them. It was no longer the time of the remarkable Rabbi who had preached to thousands and who had cured and cast out demons and faced down those who opposed him. It was now their time, and they had to gird themselves and set about telling Christ's story and sharing Christ's message.

I expect that at first they had doubts as to whether or not they could do those tasks. They had done some of it while Christ was alive, of course. He had sent them out armed with nothing but his words, in pairs, to preach and to heal, and they had had some success in this. But Christ was no longer with them to encourage and instruct them. But now they had to do it on their own.

And as is always the case, there were good days and bad days. There were days when no one would listen to them and days when thousands were baptized – more of the former than the latter, to be sure, but it was very unpredictable business.

There were days when they didn't feel good – a bad meal at the home of a follower of Christ who couldn't afford the freshest foods – and days when they felt like they couldn't come up with the right words to explain things the way that Christ had – he was so good with words, always coming up with the simplest and clearest way to help people see what God wanted them to see.

Those of us in ministry know those days well. Some days, the sermon comes easily. Some days, not so much. Some days we are consumed with the administrivia, some days are holy ground. It is the quotidian work that is both blessing and bane.

Quotidian – it's a great word. It means everyday, ordinary, or maybe even a little boring. Wrestling with the copier. Dealing with reports required by the diocese. Answering a thousand questions, and if it's a bad day, we think "why are they asking this? Didn't I answer this last week?"

It's the everyday work, and it is hard, because it is never done. There is always another service, another parishioner going through troubles, another sermon to write, another question to answer. The work is never completed.

It's okay, of course – we knew that when we accepted the call to ministry – but sometimes it is a bit wearing.

What a comfort, then, to hear Paul advising his beloved companion in ministry Timothy and encouraging him through the quotidian tasks of ministry.

This second letter to Timothy is a remarkably personal missive. It sounds a bit like a note from a "Dutch uncle" – not a real blood uncle, but an honorary relative because of the warmth of the relationship.

It starts with lots of encouragement, lots of reminders of all that Timothy learned from his dear mother Eunice and grandmother Lois, who first taught him about Jesus Christ.

And then we get a clue that perhaps Timothy is feeling a bit worn down by the quotidian tasks of ministry: after he talks about the models of Timothy's mother and grandmother, Paul writes "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."

Sounds like Timothy has been have a tough time and needs a little bucking up.

We get another clue toward the end of the reading: "Hold to the standard of sound teaching." It seems like there have been others in the area that Timothy has been working, preaching something that is similar to him, but perhaps not entirely correct, not entirely what Paul had taught Timothy.

Perhaps someone said to Timothy, "You know, the way you teach the Gospel is pretty far out. You make Jesus sound like some sort of radical reformer. Maybe if you preached like that guy Apollos who just came through, you'd get better results."

Again, this is something that is not a surprise to pastors. There have been a number of times someone has said to me, "You know, if you would just preach this way, or worship that way, or soften Jesus' message a bit, we'd grow like wildfire!" And each time I sigh inwardly and say to the person, "Thanks for the suggestion. We'll honor those suggestions, but at the heart of it, we will keep doing things the way Jesus has taught us."

This is the hard part of being a follower of Christ. It isn't all feeding five thousand and putting demons into swine. Sometimes it is simply the long hard walk on the dusty road between Galilee and Jericho. Sometimes it is having to sleep by the side of the road because there is nowhere to bunk in, or no people to offer them hospitality. Sometimes it is figuring out who will go into town for some food. Sometimes it is hearing people who don't want to receive Christ's word yelling at you, saying you're wrong, or crazy, or both. Or just ignoring you, which sometimes feels even worse.

This is not something that is unique to the clergy. It is, in fact, what Jesus told us to expect if we want to be his follower. There are no guarantees of a smooth road.

We will not always have beautiful moments where we feel God's presence powerfully and we have had a glimpse of what heaven must be like. More often, we will have the ordinary daily list of things we do, and the ordinary practice of Christianity. Occasionally, we will have the experience of being mistreated because we are followers of Christ.

But mostly, it is ordinary. Quotidian. It is the day to day practice of prayer, of worship, of giving to those in need, of helping others. It is quotidian, not dramatic. It may seem like you're not accomplishing anything. But Paul says it well: "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."

Christianity doesn't have to be dramatic to be effective. You don't know the impact your quiet and consistent practice of your faith will have on those around you. But God does, and cherishes your quotidian work.

Guard the good treasure. It may be disguised as ordinary work, quotidian tasks, mundane life as usual. But it is a treasure to you and to those around you.

Be blessed.

Amen.