

St. Timothy, 2010

Text: Matthew 24:42-47

Title: A Good Pastor

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What makes a good pastor?

If you move to a new town and start looking for a new church, what sort of pastor do you look for? When the congregation is vacant and you need to call a pastor, what qualities do you look for?

Do you want a pastor who is young and energetic or one who is older and experienced?

Do you want a pastor who is highly educated and spent his life going to school, or a second career man who's actually held a real job?

Do you want a family man with lots of kids and who can relate to family life, or do you want a single pastor who has more time to devote to the congregation?

Do you want a pastor who is calm and deliberate, or do you want a pastor who is fiery and inspiring?

Today we give thanks for Timothy, one of the first pastors of the church. And it gives us a chance to look at pastors in general. What makes a good pastor? What should a pastor be doing? Why do we even need pastors?

Timothy is an interesting character. Timothy is not an apostle. He was never a disciple of Jesus. In fact, Timothy probably never met Jesus or heard Him speak.

In the New Testament we read a lot about the apostles, those who are sent out to preach and baptize. But they're often on the move, out on missionary journeys. They are traveling from place to place and preaching the gospel to people who have never heard about Jesus.

We don't meet many pastors in the New Testament, those who stay in one place and care for a congregation for an extended period of time. This is mainly because in the New Testament, the focus is on the word of God spreading to new places. But everywhere Paul goes, he puts people in place to care for the churches he plants.

Timothy was a pastor. He began as a traveling companion of Paul, but he never was sent out on his own as a missionary. Eventually he is placed in the city of Ephesus and is pastor of the church there.

Our first reading introduces us to Timothy. It's rather brief.

Timothy was the product of a mixed marriage. His mother was a faithful Jewish woman. We learn from one of Paul's letters to Timothy that her name was Eunice, and she, along with his grandmother Lois, taught Timothy the Old Testament Scriptures from an early age.

So Timothy's mother was Jewish. Timothy's father, however, was Greek, and did not share the faith of His wife. In fact, because of him, Timothy was never circumcised. Timothy never became fully Jewish.

And yet Timothy believed in Jesus. He was a disciple.

The folks in church can't say enough good things about Timothy, so Paul invites him to come along with him. Timothy became St. Paul's right hand man. Paul just kind of picks him up and off they go.

We don't hear much about Timothy's qualifications to be a pastor – what kind of a personality he has, whether or not he's married, if he's educated. All that we know is that the folks at church speak well of him.

From that point on, Timothy becomes one of Paul's closest friends and companions. If he's not with Paul, it means that Paul has sent him on an errand for him.

Paul wrote thirteen letters, or epistles, that are in our Bible. In nine of these letters, Paul mentions Timothy as either there with him as he was writing, or as one to whom he was writing.

Two of the letters were written to Timothy - words of advice and encouragement to him as a young pastor.

The last bit of Paul's first letter to Timothy is today's Epistle. Here Paul tells Timothy what a pastor should be like.

He should flee greed and corruption, and instead, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness.

Notice the language Paul uses- flee and pursue. Run away from greed and corruption. Run towards righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness. Chase after these things. This is what a pastor should pursue- not fame and fortune for himself, not the good pleasure of the congregation, but these virtues.

Pastors should also be ready to fight the good fight of the faith. It's interesting that Paul says that a pastor should be gentle, but also a fighter. A pastor will stand up for what he believes, even if it means he will be persecuted.

Timothy fought the good fight. In Ephesus, where Timothy was pastor, there was a huge temple to the Roman goddess Diana. According to tradition, Timothy preached against Diana during one of the pagan festivals, and as a result he was beaten with clubs, and dragged outside the city

and stoned. That's why Timothy's coat of arms, which is on the back of your bulletin, shows a club surrounded by stones. Timothy fought the good fight of faith.

These first two readings make sense. The first reading introduces us to Timothy, and the epistle reminds us of Paul's charge to Timothy and points forward to Timothy's death.

But what about that pesky gospel? Where is Timothy in the gospel?

The gospel covers everything in-between. The gospel tells us what Timothy, and all pastors, should be up to in the time between when their service start and when it ends.

In the gospel, Jesus is addressing His disciples before He dies. He reminds them to be ready for His return. And while they are waiting, Jesus tells them what to do. Jesus tells them to be like faithful servants, stewards of their master's household, who give out food at the proper time.

Faithful pastors are these kinds of servants. Faithful pastors are those like Timothy who listen to these words and keep them.

Pastors are deliverymen. They deliver food. A good pastor is a good waiter.

Think about what makes a good waiter.

He may be charming and outgoing, good looking and well dressed. But the most important thing is that he brings you your food, that he delivers what you need.

In the end, the waiter's personality and appearance don't matter. You can have the most friendly, charming waiter in the world, but if he doesn't bring you your food in time, if he spends his time chatting with the rest of the staff, or if he brings you the wrong food, it doesn't really matter.

Pastors are deliverymen, like waiters, there to bring food to the people of God. They are the ones the Lord sends to make sure that His people get what they need and are well cared for.

On the cross, Jesus won salvation and life for us. But those gifts still need to be delivered. They need to be handed out. Jesus died on the cross two thousand years ago and thousands of miles away from here. How does what happened there get to you here and now? It needs to be delivered.

Consider the situation in Haiti. People from all over the world are donating money and supplies to help rebuild this country. There are donations sitting out in the narthex right now. But the donations don't do any good unless they are delivered. If they sit here in our church, they aren't doing anyone any good. And if they are just dropped off at the airport in Port au Prince and left there, they won't get to the people who need them the most. These supplies need to be delivered, handed out, carefully distributed so that people get what they need.

So pastors are the deliverymen. They are the ones sent to deliver the Lord's gifts. They are sent to preach the good news, to give out new life in Holy Baptism, to forgive sins in Holy Absolution, to give out the Lord's Body and Blood in the Holy Supper.

This is how what happened on Calvary gets to you, here and now. Today. Through these means of grace, we have forgiveness, life, and salvation.

God loves you so much, that He sends you pastors to give out these gifts, to make sure that they get delivered.

Good pastors are those men who preach God's word, both law and gospel, and deliver all the treasures in God's word to you.

Good pastors are those who call you to confess your sins and then speak God's Words of forgiveness and absolution to you.

Good pastors are those who invite and encourage you to the Lord's Table and give out His body and blood [according to Christ's institution].

All of this is for you, for your benefit.

God sent Timothy to serve the people of Ephesus. He's sent many pastors to you in the course of your life. Each one is different, but hopefully they all have something in common. They are all sent to you to do the same thing, to deliver God's gifts to you, to make sure that you're well-fed and ready for when the master of the house returns.