

His Beautiful Confession

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week; it's a little strange to be here on a Tuesday isn't it? We're accustomed to coming to church on Sundays, obviously. On Wednesdays in Lent and Advent we definitely show up and for some, it's a weekly occurrence. Occasionally a Thursday is thrown in. And this week Friday and Saturday are not to be missed. But who comes to church expecting a service on a Tuesday? Praise be to God—you do!

The church fathers recognized the importance of each day of this week, of that there is no debate. The readings throughout this passion-tide continue to point us to the cross and to our Savior who will soon be hanging there. Christ has entered Jerusalem, as we celebrated on Sunday. The scene is beginning to take form and our eyes and ears, voices and minds, and hearts ready themselves for the sacrifice that fulfills all sacrifices and the victory that will seal our fate. To God be the glory.

Soon will begin the Paschal Triduum—that unique time from Maundy Thursday through the Easter Evening Service in which God's service to us continues day after day as we receive His blessing in His Word and Sacrament. But we aren't quite there yet. Today/tonight we receive a full account of the passion narrative in our Gospel reading, and a prophecy from Ezekiel. But we also hear instruction from one brother in Christ to another by way of our Epistle reading. It is these words to which we turn our attention. Paul writes to Timothy:

Continue to struggle the beautiful struggle of the faith, lay hold of the eternal life unto which you have been called and have confessed a beautiful confession before many witnesses. I instruct you before God, who continually makes all things alive, and of Christ

Jesus, who witnessed upon Pontius Pilate the beautiful confession, to keep the commandment without spot, irreproachable, until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

First a little background: You'll recall that Timothy has been placed by Paul in a position of authority over the church in Ephesus. Paul is not one to turn his back on those who share in the evangelizing work of the church, certainly not on those whom he has placed in position. So we find in this letter instruction to Timothy on the care of the church and equally importantly, warning of false teachers. In the preceding verse, Paul states "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness." To what "things" is he referring? Verse 10 may sound familiar to you: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils." Timothy is encouraged, yay, commanded to flee such things... and to pursue righteousness; to turn from evil and press on to godliness; to resist, to fight temptation, to continue the struggle of the Faith.

Our daily drowning of the old Adam is a continuous effort. The devil, the world and our own sinful flesh are very good swimmers in deed. Luther calls this day by day battle that is our lives a "toilsome course." We toil with temptation, we labor against the forces of darkness as we continue to struggle the beautiful struggle of the Faith. So what's so beautiful about it? Why would Paul use such a word to call it "beautiful," or as some translate "good?" Paul alludes to it in the ensuing words.

Lay hold of the eternal life unto which you have been called and have confessed a beautiful confession before many witnesses.²

¹ 1 Timothy 6:12-14

² 1 Timothy 6:12b

As it turns out, this isn't really about Timothy, or Paul, or even about Luther. This "beautiful struggle" or "good fight" isn't ours. Make no mistake, our condition isn't beautiful. No amount of effort on your part or mine can bring us any degree of success in this battle. Your sins and mine only separate us from God and no works of our own can be considered "good" much less "beautiful" to the Almighty I Am. So Paul is spot on when he turns the discussion to our calling, or more specifically, to the One who does the calling.

Paul doesn't give Timothy a list of steps, he doesn't tell him to pray better, to serve more, or to try harder. He says to "*Lay hold of the eternal life unto which you have been called.*" God has called Timothy; he has called him (and you) unto eternal life. In essence, he is saying, "Hold onto Christ, for He is the One Who grants eternal life." In Christ is found your calling; in Him are you beautifully clothed for eternal life. In your baptism, God affected your salvation. This is the beauty of the Faith. God's goodness and beauty is imparted on you. The confession of eternal life points to God's steadfast love for you and for all whom He has called to eternal life.

Remarkably this calling guards and protects you not just eternally, but also presently. God's good gifts to you aren't just for later, they are for now. The struggle is now, but thanks be to God, so are the rich blessings of His promises. The Victor of the battle between forces of good and evil has already won. The whole armor of God is yours to hold claim to and adorn. Christ's triumph is your triumph. His triumph is the cross. Look to where the King's armor was displayed for all to see—the victory trophy of God over the devil. There is the beauty of the struggle; that is what makes the fight good.

Paul continues his instruction to Timothy, but first establishes the context of the instruction by calling on the Creator as a witness. *I command*

you before god, who continually makes all things alive. Here Paul calls upon God as Yahweh that is, “I am who causes to be.” Not only does He make things alive, He continues to keep them alive. God is not distant, watching what happens in this little struggle of ours. Rather, He continues His loving, creative work in His care and protection of His own.

Secondly, this command to Timothy is made before Christ Jesus. The perspective which Paul chooses here to characterize Jesus is as He “*who witnessed upon Pontius Pilate the beautiful confession.*” You are free to observe here, as previously, the use of the word beautiful. The Savior’s witness during His trial was of the beautiful confession of the Faith. Even in extraordinary circumstances, the Sinless One who was, and still is, true man, was (and still is) the faithful and true witness of the Faith. He did this not to be our example, for who among us could live a life according to His standard, but as a testimony to the love of God and the redemptive, noble, good, beautiful work which He was about to accomplish. This is the Jesus before which Timothy’s command is given. So what is Paul charging Timothy to do?

The charge is to *keep the beautiful confession without spot, irreproachable, until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Of course, this exhortation isn’t just for Timothy, it is for you and me; it is for the church. God’s Word, not simply Paul’s letter, urges His church to hold fast to the beautiful confession of the Faith until Christ’s return in the clouds. A particular word is used here to illustrate this “holding fast.”

In by-gone days, castles were used for residency, storage and defense. An important component of a castle was the “keep.” It was usually an

oversized, fortified tower that was used as a refuge of last resort in the event that the castle was captured or fell. , This concept of a “keep” as a refuge of last resort, of primary importance, is the lens through which you are free to see the treasure that is the Faith. That is how you, and Timothy, are instructed to cherish it and to hold and protect it just as it was given to you.

That is why He has brought you here to this service of His to you this day—this Tuesday. As you hear the proclamation of the Gospel, as you rightly receive His body and blood, as you behold new Baptisms or remember your own, as you live the life to which you were called and allow God to do the good works that He has prepared for you, as you confess your sins and receive his absolution; as you live under His grace this testimony is kept pure in you.

And so even in this week overshadowed, and at the same time illumined, by the death of our Savior, God speaks to you of the life that you are free to live. He continues to work in your life by the power of His Holy Spirit the beautiful confession of the Faith. For this work in your life and the lives of all believers, we respond with thanksgiving. We give our thanks to the Spirit who strengthens us during our struggles, to the Son who witnessed the good confession of the Faith, and to our loving Father who called us to eternal life.

The peace that passes all understanding, produced from His beautiful confession, guard your hearts and minds in Him. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week

March 22, 2016

Jeremiah 11:18-20
Psalm 54 (antiphon v.4)
1 Timothy 6:12-14
Mark 14:1-15:47

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