

CONTINUE TO PRESS ON (IN) THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE OF THE FAITH

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

Continue to press on (in) the beautiful struggle of the Faith, you must have laid hold of the eternal life, into which you were called, and (in which) you have confessed the beautiful confession before many witnesses.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This is the day in which the Church, all around the world, is called to remember the events that took place on Tuesday of the first Holy Week. In past years in this place, you have heard that the old title of the day was "Spy Tuesday." That was given to the day on account of the Gospels' reports of Judas (who had been possessed by the Satan) collaborating with the High Priests in order to betray Jesus into their hands.

This day follows a day, as a handful of our members heard in person, called, "Holy Monday." That, you should know, was the day that we were given to remember that Jesus' hour had come. That was the hour of His glory that would come as He ascended the cross.

With Jesus' hour of glory remembered yesterday, Holy Tuesday has now been given to us. That was done long ago that we might recall the events that took place on that day in the first Holy Week, the week of Jesus' Passion. The divinely inspired records of Sts. Matthew and Mark record that the anointing of Jesus, for burial, took place on that Tuesday.

Further, the witnesses of the Gospels reveal that day was, in time, two days (evenings and mornings) before Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Altar. His giving His Body and Blood in, with, and under bread and wine, a visible Means of Grace, preceded His being handed over into death for holding onto the good confession of the Faith.

Therefore, this Holy Tuesday we are being called to remember Jesus' beautiful confession. That is that He was, is, and ever shall be the Anointed One of God. That

¹ 1 Timothy 6:12.

means that He is the Messiah Who is also the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. God and man, in an enduring personal union, is the Prophet, Priest and King. He alone, of all the children of woman, could and did offer Himself to God His Father as the perfect, final and complete Sacrifice for sin, for all people, for all time.

Following Jesus' good and beautiful confession into death, men would later be placed into the Office of the Holy Ministry that Jesus himself had created. Those men, down into our age, have been called, by texts such as today's from the Letter to Timothy, to also hold onto the good, beautiful, glorious confession of the Faith. They were, and are, to continue to hear that they, we pastors, are called to teach the glorious confession of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins to all whom God would place into our care through His Means of Grace. Those are, to name the ones that come first to most Christians' minds – the Proclaimed Word, Holy Absolution (along with the mutual consolation of the brethren), Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar.

Among the first pastors God set into the Office Christ established to care for His people was a man named Timothy. He was a disciple, a follower, of Jesus through human instrumentality. Timothy had been guided into the mysteries, truths and teachings of Jesus through the instruction of the missionary Pastor and Apostle now known as Paul of Tarsus.

Out of the teaching Paul gave him, St. Timothy was ordained and installed as Pastor. That occurred sometime after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension to the Right Hand of God. It was to Timothy that his mentor, Paul, wrote the words we are hearing from today. He did so to give him encouragement as that young pastor faced the struggles, persecutions, trials, pressures and many other evils that afflicted the congregations of Christ, and their members, in this sin-filled world. They are certainly applicable to Christian pastors today in a world filled with the effects of sin... and as we deal with the demon, "Fear," that is running amok. With all of that in mind, hear again the opening translation of Paul's words to Timothy:

Continue to press on (in) the beautiful struggle of the Faith; you must have laid hold of the eternal life, into which you were called, and (in which) you have confessed the beautiful confession before many witnesses.²

For over a decade now, this congregation has heard words like those each Holy Tuesday. They have been repeatedly declared to remind our hearers that your pastors are called by God to continue to declare the eternal life which we have grasped through Christ's Faith. We are to believe fully and completely that which we preach. One of my pastor-mentors taught in one of my homiletics (preaching) classes, "Gentlemen, when you are done preaching, the skeptical hearer should say, 'Well, I don't know if I believe what he said, but he sure does!'"³

St. Paul's words concerning the beautiful confession of the Faith still call the men whom God places into the Office of the Holy Ministry to remember that we too, have been called into eternal life through His Means of Grace. On account of that, pastors, beginning with Timothy, have been reminded that we each have made the beautiful confession of Christ's death. That empowers us to remember that we are called, at all times, to proclaim Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins. We receive strength to declare that His Word and work alone rescues sinners like us from sin, death, hell and the devil.

All of that is summed up in the, "Christ-articles," of the ecumenical Christian Creeds. From them, the good and beautiful confession of Jesus may be summarized like this:

The little word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there.⁴

St. Timothy, and all pastors who have followed in the Office of the Holy Ministry in teachings flowing from the work of the Apostles, are to keep our hearers centered on the

² 1 Timothy 6:12.

³ Deffner, Donald. Oral classroom instruction. Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, circa A.D. 1995-1996.

⁴ *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 1959 (T. G. Tappert, Ed.) (414). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

Beautiful Confession of Jesus our Lord. That is, again stated another way, that He alone has brought us back from all that would keep us from blessed eternal life with God.

That having been said, Holy Tuesday, then, is given to us to that we might all be called to examine our lives with regard to our life callings as they relate to the beautiful confession of our Lord Jesus the Christ. Hear again St. Paul's instructions to St. Timothy, to all pastors, and to the Church and her individual members:

Continue to press on the beautiful struggle of the Faith, you must have laid hold of the eternal life, into which you were called, and (in which) you have confessed the beautiful confession before many witnesses.⁵

All true pastors are called to proclaim Christ-crucified. The hearers of the Word are to be true to following the Christ Whom they hear declared from out of the Scriptures. By God's grace, He continues to be preached from truly evangelical (that is, of the Gospel) pulpits. That means that you who are hearers of the Word are this Holy Tuesday being called to be true to hearing the Word.

This Holy Week, more than perhaps any in our lifetimes, the results of Adam's Fall into sin have challenged us to be faithful to hearing the Word. God's people, who are meant by Him to be one Family, who are to be regularly gathered physically around His altars with His pastors for them, are being kept at distances from each other. These are, in part, the results of the worldly – First Use of the Law, "to keep order in society," edicts. Those are in place with a hope that such efforts will stem the speed of the transmission the most recent pestilence. Even so, we need to remember that has come into the world on account of the devolution (falling apart on account of sin) of God's once good creation. And, it is true for some people, that the distances we are now having placed between us are also occurring on account of fear.

Dear ones in Christ, we thank God that you are following the guidance of the Governor of Arizona. We also thank God you are following the greater calling of God: to

⁵ 1 Timothy 6:12.

hear His Word – even if that is through the use of electronic media for a time. We few Who have been gathered here by God tonight give thanks that the life of the Church – through the prayer offices of the Church – continues. They do so as the results of sin visibly, audibly, physically, emotionally and spiritually, press in upon so many. We ache with those who yearn to be here, yet for the sake of their health or that of their neighbors are remaining apart for a time. We rejoice with those who are rotating through the Lord’s services that His Word might physically continue to be proclaimed in the physical presence of humans during this time of tribulation.

From that, we might conclude that St. Paul’s Words to St. Timothy are particularly important for us this Holy Tuesday. This is what we pastors are called to continue to do, and our hearers to hear:

I continue to command [to you] before the God, the One continually making all things alive, and of Christ Jesus, the One having witnessed before Pontius Pilate the beautiful confession, (that you) have guarded the commandment without spot, irreproachable, until the manifestation of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ.⁶

That divine expectation was present even before Paul was moved to write that, that is, when Jesus had called the Twelve to Himself. All of them would not hold onto the beautiful confession of Christ that He made before the governor of that age and place (at least until after they received the Holy Spirit). One of the Twelve would fall further even further. He fully rejected Jesus’ good confession, and His commandment to teach all that He had taught them. That one would hand Him over to those who would destroy Him. Judas fell into the temptations of this world and betrayed the Author of life into death. Even so, from the events that followed that betrayal, Jesus declared the good confession that His kingdom was not of this world.⁷

Today, we have been hearing of that beautiful confession because God has empowered and equipped through the hearing of His Word, faithful men in every

⁶ 1 Timothy 6:13-14.

⁷ c.f. John 18:36f.

generation, from St. Paul down to our age. We pray that will continue until Christ returns with the full manifestation of His Triumphant return in eternal glory.

In the meantime, today you are being called to pray that pastors continue to have courage. That is, as was discussed by two pastors this morning, it is OK to be afraid (while holding it inside for the benefit of the hearers of God's Word) all the while still doing the right biblical things! In the Good Confession of the Faith, you are free to continue to remind pastors who desire to be found faithful that they have all they need to keep you in the good, beautiful, glorious confession of the Faith of Christ Jesus – that is, His Word and Sacraments.

In the beautiful confession of the Faith, pastors are free to declare to you that Christ has been crucified for the forgiveness of all of your sins! In Christ, we are all free to be obedient to God's command. We are to take courage in His Word that we will bear all of this (pestilence, distancing rules, shortages of personal protective equipment and more) to the honor and glory of our Lord God!

After all, we Christians are not suffering in these days of pestilence as those who apart from Christ Jesus. For them, suffering is for the evil they have done. For us Christians, suffering is for the praise, honor and glory of God. This we can and will bear because Christ has already suffered for us! (Please stand)

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Holy Week Tuesday

Psalm 54; Jeremiah 11:18-20; I Timothy 6:12-14; Mark 14:1 - 15:46

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Soli Deo Gloria