

Sermon#980: 2 Timothy 2:19-22 (*Laache text*)

9-9-12 (14th Sunday After Trinity/Sunday School Rally Day), Bethany-Princeton

CLEANSED FROM DISHONOR TO BE A VESSEL FOR HONOR

Prayer: Merciful God and Father, You see that because of our sinful nature we do not delight in Your Word like we should. Satan, our own sinful flesh, the children of the world, false teachers, and other causes so easily keep us from hearing it. We are, besides, too indolent and careless to hear and keep Your Word. In mercy forgive us, and help us to gladly hear and learn it. May there be nothing in this world dearer to us than Your Word; may we always regard it as our most precious treasure. Grant this, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Text, 2 Timothy 2:19-22. ¹⁹ Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." ²⁰ But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. By Your Word of truth, lead these Your children on the way of truth unto life everlasting. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

2 Timothy is a book of the Bible, yes, but it is also a tear-stained letter. The apostle Paul was in prison, and he was not expecting to be set free. He was preparing himself to face being killed with the sword. He was preparing to leave the world with no more opportunities to preach to the young Christian churches. He was going to have to leave this work to men like the young pastor Timothy. He and Timothy had worked side by side, had traveled together, but now Timothy would do it without Paul, without Paul's helpful wise counsel and advice. So St. Paul wrote a second letter, or epistle, to him – Second Timothy, as we call it.

It is a "pastoral epistle." It's written to a pastor and it's in the Bible especially for pastors and their work. In 2 Timothy, the apostle Paul gives serious

warnings about the effects that false teachings would have on Jesus' church and how people would not be patient with the true teaching of God's Word. It can be discouraging to see how accurately these words have come true in our own time, but it is a book, a letter, that is written to encourage us and to encourage pastors who – like Timothy must have – get discouraged when the Word doesn't have its way in people's lives, when it does not seem to prosper in ways that you can see.

Does this kind of discouragement seem like an unusual subject for a Rally Day? Well, although all our children and youth are precious to us, bringing your children – and yourself -- to church and to Sunday School or Bible class, is far from being some harmless little activity. It is a serious endeavor that is taken seriously by the old evil foe. We see that here in St. Paul's strong statements, **"Flee youthful lusts,"** and **"Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity,"** and that one has to **"pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace ..."**

But I'd like to go back to that word "precious" that we use in speaking of our children, to focus in on the seriousness of the situation. St. Paul speaks about this preciousness too, when he mentions **"gold and silver."** He's talking about your children. He's talking about you. He is doing what we often do when teaching children: using an illustration, telling a picture-story to make his point, and the point of this one is extremely serious. It's life and death – the eternal kind:

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

St. Paul pictures each person as a "vessel" that plays a part in a large household, by which he means the visible church. Everyone you see when you come to church, everyone who claims to be a Christian, is a "vessel" in this way, and is used by **"the Master"** in some way. But it says here that some are **"vessels**

of gold and silver,” very precious, never to be discarded, and these are the vessels “for honor,” while others are “for dishonor,” they are made “of wood and clay,” which means that ultimately they will be thrown out with the garbage.

Why is St. Paul telling Pastor Timothy this in this parting letter? He wants Timothy to see everyone as a vessel. A vessel holds something. You pour something into a vessel, or put something in it. The sacramental vessels in church hold wine and bread that are used in the Lord’s Supper, and the wine and bread serve as vessels for Jesus’ body and blood to be in, with and under them. Vessels in the Old Testament temple were like that too: holding something sacred. St. Paul elsewhere speaks of a Christian’s body as a vessel – a vessel for your true self; how you use your body is knowing “*how to possess your vessel.*” Being a vessel is about what *enters* you, what’s poured *into* you, and what comes *out* of you.

This is how pastors are to think of the church members, and this is how we all are to think of our children: as vessels who are here in this “great house” to be “**useful for the Master,**” our Lord Jesus, to be used by Him. Shouldn’t this make us think about how careful we must be to fill them with the right things?

This brings us back to St. Paul’s strong statements, “**Flee youthful lusts,**” and “**depart from iniquity,**” and that one has to be firmly pushed to “**pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace ...**” It’s about what you’re being filled with.

Do you watch TV shows where families and friends primarily speak insults to each other, denigrate women, show disrespect to fathers, and where homosexual relationships are presented as normal? Do you allow unlimited use of the internet, where pornography is easy to access? Do the movies you watch routinely show unmarried couples living together? What are the messages being sent by the music that you listen to or that you unquestioningly allow your kids to listen to? Do you teach your kids how to choose friends, and guard them from unchristian influences both in who their friends are and what their leisure activi-

ties are? Do you guard yourself in this way? Do you talk to your children about God's view of marriage and family, the right order of things? If we're careless in these areas, do we honestly expect our youth to choose marriage before sex, our families to coexist in mutual love and respect, and our decisions to be made first according to what our Lord wants and what He considers most important?

We act like it will all just happen by accident. They'll just turn out OK. But it isn't by accident. Everyone is a vessel being filled up all the time. It is not by accident that someone will be a "vessel of gold or silver" that endures to eternal life vs. being a "vessel of wood or clay" that gets thrown out and cast into the fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

When St. Paul writes, "**The Lord knows those who are His,**" he actually says "the Lord *knew* them," that is, He knew them in eternity, chose and called them in eternity to be His own, and they cannot be lost. They will always be known by Him. The others are never known by Him; He will say, "*I never knew you*" (Mt 7:21). As a pastor, I can't know in an absolute sense who are God's elect. I can't see into the heart as God does. So I treat everyone as "**gold and silver,**" absolutely precious. I treat you as saints. You are my "fellow redeemed," redeemed with Jesus' blood. Jesus died for you, and you are precious to Him. By His blood you are purified from your sins, as gold is pure. But I also know that like me you are sinners, you are surrounded by iniquity and evil lusts, you and I are always in danger of becoming "**vessels of wood and clay,**" because of all the filth that we are being filled with daily, deserving to be thrown out for eternity.

But the good news is that there is an antidote to this. St. Paul says that you "**will be a vessel for honor**" if and when "**anyone cleanses himself from**" sin. You can't do this yourself, of course. Jesus does it for you. "*The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.*" The only thing in heaven and earth that has power to cleanse you is His blood.

Jesus' blood gives power to His Word to forgive all your sins, even the worst ones. His blood is present in the water of baptism, through the Word, to wash your sin away. His blood in, with and under the wine in the Lord's Supper, is drunk by you for the remission of your sins, so that this blood, shed for you and given to you, that cleanses you is IN you. Just those few drops fill you so that NONE of the unclean filth taken in by you remains. Jesus' blood washes it away and fills you with His holiness. As St. Paul says, by this you are "**sanctified**" – made holy – "**and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.**"

This is what we are doing in Sunday School. Children, while you are learning Bible lessons you are being filled with Jesus, with true knowledge of Him, and what He has done for you. Even the Old Testament lessons do this. Jesus said that Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets were speaking ahead of time about Him. When we listen to the history the Bible teaches –which we call salvation history, the history of your salvation -- Jesus is coming into you, even you children, just as He comes into each person who communes in the Lord's Supper who can then say, "*my Savior dwells within me now*" (ELH #325 v. 2).

As Jesus comes to you in His Word, you are being changed from a vessel that gets filled with the wrong things – and so is filled with guilt and shame, fear and dread, nervousness and defensiveness – into a vessel that is filled by Jesus and the knowledge of Him as your Savior who only loves and forgives you – and so you end up filled with confidence, joy, gentleness, kindness, brotherly love, patience and peacefulness. His cleansing makes you chaste and pure in His sight and gives you the ability to keep fleeing youthful lusts, and keep pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace. This is the reason not to stay away: only here will you be able to remain a precious gold vessel, filled with Him! And you are not alone, but you join all of us who, by His grace, "**call on the Lord out of a pure heart,**" a heart purified by Him through His holy, precious blood. Amen!