

1 Timothy 1:5-17 (Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)

“Jesus Saves Sinners Like Me”

Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT

September 11, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is the Epistle lesson from 1 Timothy 1:

⁵Now the goal of this commandment is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith, ⁶from which certain ones, losing their way, wandered into empty talk, ⁷wanting to be teachers of the law, but not understanding either the things that they were saying or about the things which they were confidently speaking. ⁸Now we know that the law is good if anyone uses it lawfully. ⁹Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the righteous, but for the lawless and the disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and the profane, for those who murder their father and mother, for murderers, ¹⁰for the sexually immoral, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching ¹¹according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. ¹²I am grateful to the One who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus, our Lord, because He has considered me faithful, appointing me for service, ¹³being formerly a blasphemer and persecutor and a violent man. But He has sown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴But the grace of our Lord abounded greatly with faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But I received mercy for this reason: so that in me, the foremost, Christ Jesus might display His complete patience as an example to those who were about to believe on Him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, God alone, be honor and glory into the ages of ages. Amen.

For the next several Sundays the Epistle readings take us through Paul’s first letter to Timothy. These Epistle lessons will serve as the sermon texts as we walk together through this pastoral epistle. The pastoral epistles are Paul’s two letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus. As you might guess, they are called “pastoral” epistles / letters, because they are written to two pastors—Timothy and Titus. There were no schools like our seminaries, so the apostle Paul mentored these men, teaching and encouraging them as pastors of God’s people. Our focus, then, will be on Timothy.

What do we know about Timothy? Timothy was from Lystra in modern Turkey. He was the son of a Gentile father and a Christian mother named Eunice. It was in Lystra that Paul

met Timothy. Timothy then joined Paul as his traveling companion and eventually, Paul's trusted assistant. By the time of our text, Timothy was a pastor in the city of Ephesus, on the west coast of Turkey. It was while pastor there that Paul wrote this letter to give Timothy counsel and direction.

On his third missionary journey, Paul had built up a strong Christian congregation in Ephesus. But the apostle knew that Satan would soon try to lead those believers away from the truth by sending false teachers into their midst (Acts 20:29–30). When Timothy became pastor of that church, he discovered that Paul's prophecy had come true. Some men in Ephesus were actually teaching other doctrines, matters that were contrary to the truths Paul had taught. These people were indeed using the Bible, but they employed it in the wrong way. Some read into the Scriptures things that were not there. They invented myths and legendary stories about the Old Testament saints, and they attached great importance to the genealogies, or lists of names, raising all kinds of useless questions about them. Others claimed that they were teaching the true meaning and use of the Law, but they misunderstood its purpose and wasted their time with worthless disputes after the manner of the Jewish scribes. They taught that unless a person kept the Law he could not be saved, but they had not grasped that the Law demands love out of a pure heart and that only a believer in Jesus can do what the Law requires.

Paul directed Timothy to the fact that God's law is good. It has to be good because it was given by a good and just and holy God. But it is only good when it is used "lawfully" or in the way in which God intended it. Its primary use is to show people how far they have fallen from God's righteousness and holiness. Paul writes to Timothy, "Understanding this, that the

law is not laid down for the righteous, but for the lawless and the disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and the profane." Sure sounds like you and me at times, doesn't it? So, the Law as we find it in God's Commandments clearly illustrates that, because of our fallen, sin-filled natures, we are not always the people God intends us to be.

Do you and I always listen to sound teaching? Do we always faithfully follow the Lord's command to love Him first and always and to love our neighbors as ourselves? No, we don't. We stumble and fall into temptation and sin. We fall short of God's perfect righteousness as we fall prey to the desires of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. Maybe you look at Paul's list here and say, "That isn't me!" But look again. The Law is for "those who murder their father and mother, for murderers." What was going on in Ephesus for Paul to write that?? But when we do not honor our father and mother and other authorities, do we not hurt and harm them in their bodies with our words and actions, breaking both the 4th and 5th Commandments? And the 6th Commandment means that we should lead "a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other." How often do we fail in this in our desires, thoughts, words, and actions? And what about being liars and perjurers? Eighth Commandment stuff right there as we are to "fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way." We don't always shine well in that light, either.

Maybe, just maybe, we could be like the apostle Paul. But wait, we are. Paul was by nature sinful and unclean, too. He was, by His own confession, "a blasphemer and persecutor and a violent man." And what was given to Paul is what is given to you and me: the grace

our Lord abounding greatly with the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. I'm a sinner. You're a sinner. Paul was a sinner. All of us, fallen short of the glory of God. But know this—The saying is trustworthy and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

Jesus—the name given to Him by the angel—means “Yahweh saves.” Gabriel said to Joseph, “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21 ESV). Paul wrote to Titus, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4–7 ESV).

The Church Father, St. Augustine, said, “There was no reason for Christ the Lord to come, except to save sinners.” God the Son, at His incarnation, took to Himself a true human body and soul, and entered into the realm in which we humans live and sin. In humanity's place, this Jesus lived a perfect life according to all of God's commandments—the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th; the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 9th, and 10th! All of God's good Law Jesus fulfilled for you and me so that He might give to us His own righteousness. By the mercy and grace of God the Father, He looks upon us and sees the perfect rightness of Jesus and He says to you and me, “In my Son you are righteous and holy before Me.” By the mercy and grace of God the Father, Jesus suffered the punishment for our sins and died our death on the cross. Jesus shed His holy, precious blood to purchase our forgiveness for all our sins, for all the times we

have fallen short of God's perfect righteousness. By the mercy and grace of God the Father, Jesus is risen from the dead guaranteeing that death does not have the last word for Him or for us. We are given eternal life in body and soul and so we will rise from the dead on the Last Day when the Lord Jesus comes again in all His glory as the King of the ages.

This Good News is the "beating heart" of all our hope and joy! God's patience and mercy are at work in Christ Jesus to save us and all sinners from death and hell. At the cross and the empty tomb, we see the completion of God's Promise to save. Through the gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. As we sang and confessed in the sermon hymn, "Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me, Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His and He is mine." Amen.