

## *When the Church Was Young*

13<sup>th</sup> Weekend after Pentecost – September 2/3, 2006

### Sermon Background Study

*Psalm 119:41-48 (The Message)*

Let your love, GOD, shape my life  
with salvation, exactly as you promised;  
Then I'll be able to stand up to mockery  
because I trusted your Word.  
Don't ever deprive me of truth, not ever—  
your commandments are what I depend on.  
Oh, I'll guard with my life what you've revealed to me,  
guard it now, guard it ever;  
And I'll stride freely through wide open spaces  
as I look for your truth and your wisdom;  
Then I'll tell the world what I find,  
speak out boldly in public, unembarrassed.  
I cherish your commandments—oh, how I love them!—  
relishing every fragment of your counsel.

*1 Timothy 3:14-16 (NRSV)*

<sup>14</sup>I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, <sup>15</sup>if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. <sup>16</sup>Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:

He was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory.

*As we approach St. Andrew's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is appropriate that we reflect on exactly what is that we are about.*

Sometimes when we write letters, we set the purpose out right at the beginning. When Paul wrote a letter to Timothy he did not. Instead, it is today's passage that explains the letter. Paul is hoping to see Timothy soon but fears that he might be delayed. So, in this letter we call 1 Timothy, Paul sets out his most urgent and important instructions for his associate. Why urgent? Because Timothy is in Ephesus, one of the most important cities in the empire, and, judging by this letter, the Ephesian church is failing. They don't have their house together – in two senses.

*The household*

First, even a quick read through 1 Timothy reveals that Paul expects them to order the Ephesian church after the model of an orderly household. After all, the people of God are the family of God. Thus, modeling the church on a well-functioning

#### The Pastoral Letters

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Letters because they are addressed to individuals, not church communities, and speak to different issues. These letters were also written much later in Paul's life than Romans, Galatians, and so on.

After Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (60-62D) he was released, as he expected. His missionary work continued for several years until he was arrested again, imprisoned in Rome a second time, and executed. 2 Timothy was written from Rome during this second imprisonment, from which Paul did not expect to be released.

Because these letters were written nearly twenty years after Paul's earliest NT letters, they address directly the problems of a second or even third-generation church. Christianity has become a family affair, handed down from one generation to the next. Timothy, one of Paul's closest and dearest helpers and companions, is the son of a Jewish-Christian mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois.

These letters are Paul's advice and instructions to Timothy and Titus as they continue Paul's work of building up Christian communities. Issues such as organization structure, false teaching, money, picking effective leaders, their own spiritual development, etc. are all tackled by Paul in these letters. They provide a powerful and challenging vision of how to nurture the church.

Few NT passages are more controversial than 1 Timothy 2:9-11 and its teachings on the role of women in worship. It is tempting to simply ignore it. In his commentary on these letters, Methodist theologian Thomas Oden writes,

"This paragraph of Paul's letter to Timothy cannot be read without raising hackles and blood pressure. . . . This is a passage I have always disliked, resisted, and until now avoided at all costs. To be confronted with the task of preaching or teaching on it is not easy. One is tempted to evade the task by making a few vague generalizations. But insofar as I have allowed myself to be examined anew by the text, I have slowly come to realize that Paul requires my closest attention in grasping his deeper meaning and intention. However I may resist it, it comes to me as the word of God, asking me to listen and pray for guidance. So even against my reservations, the text has gradually invaded my consciousness and made its mark."

If you would like a copy of Oden's thoughts on this passage, I'll be glad to e-mail you a copy. My e-mail is [sengle@standrewacademy.org](mailto:sengle@standrewacademy.org)

family makes a lot of sense. There need not be lots of organization structure, but there does need to be authority and leaders. Qualifications for leadership are based foremost upon character. The family members are to honor one another and see that the needs of the weakest are met. The love of money and all the attendant problems are to be avoided. They are to hold to the truth they were taught and seek contentment in all things. None of this seems to characterize the Ephesian church.

But there is a second meaning at work here. The Ephesian Christians, with all Christians, are the house of God, built on a sure foundation. They are a pillar of God's truth. The Jews understood the temple in Jerusalem to be the "house of God, but now the people of God themselves are God's temple, individually and collectively (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 & 6:19-20). They are the church of the living God. God's truth has been entrusted to them – and to us. Even here, the Ephesians have fallen prey to false teaching. Not surprisingly, the threat of false teaching is a growing problem as the decades go by and one generation passes the faith on to the next. What is this truth?

#### *The truth of mystery*

As Paul writes, God's truth is a mystery (*mysterion* in the Greek). He doesn't mean we don't know the truth. Rather, a mystery is something that we could never know or learn until it has been revealed to us.<sup>1</sup> In other words, we could never discover this truth on our own. But we are blessed because God has pulled back the curtain revealing the truth to us – the truth that is Jesus Christ.

#### *Believing God (a study by Beth Moore) for women only!*

Do you take God at his word, believing what he has told us, or do you just believe in his existence and the salvation he offers? Based on Isaiah 43:10, *Believing God: Experiencing a Fresh Explosion of Faith*, by Beth Moore, explores what it means to truly believe God and recognize his hand in our daily living.

The Beth Moore studies are always very popular and meaningful opportunities for Christian women to learn and to grow together. This 10-week video-based study will inspire and empower you!

This study is being offered twice: Monday mornings, 10am to noon, and Monday evenings, 7pm to 9pm. Classes will begin on September 11 and will be led by Rev. Renee Giles and Vicky Dearing.

#### *Sinning Like a Christian: A new look at the seven deadly sins*

Sin is not talked about much any more. When we do, we assume that it is just something that we do wrong. Rather, sin is the problem we have between us and God. Using this penetrating and challenging book by Bishop William Willimon, we'll take a new look at the seven deadly sins, asking ourselves "why in God's name we should trouble our consciences about them at all."

This discussion-oriented class will meet at lunchtime, 11:45-12:00, on Thursdays beginning September 14. The group will be led by Rev. Doug Meyer.

To register on-line for these or other St. Andrew Academy fall classes, please go to [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org)

Paul expresses this truth by using what is surely a bit of an early Christian hymn (v. 16). Jesus doesn't even have to be named. Who else could this hymn be about? It also isn't necessary to treat the hymn as a chronological summary of Jesus' life. Indeed, scholars can't agree on the exact meaning of each phrase in this hymn. Still, we certainly get Paul's point. The enormity of the Christ event was revealed to us in the incarnation (Jesus being God-made-flesh), his vindication, and his return to the Father. Jesus is the revelation of God's love and covenant faithfulness. This is the truth that, as the psalmist puts it, we are to proclaim boldly and unembarrassed.

#### *Boldly and unembarrassed*

God has revealed himself and his saving work in Jesus Christ, but that is not the end of it. As we saw last week and as reiterated in today's Scripture passages, this revelation must be proclaimed if the world is to believe it. The psalmist is on a search for the truth and is ready to proclaim it boldly and unembarrassed when he finds it. The truth has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We are to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19) and that has to begin with our proclamation of Jesus to the world. You can't make a disciple of someone who knows nothing of Jesus.

You might say that this is God's work, the pouring out of his grace – and you'd be right. But it is also our work. We are the ones through whom God's saving purposes moves forward. As we come to our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at St. Andrew, the question to ask ourselves is this: Does our larger community see and hear our proclamation of Jesus Christ in all that we say and in all that we do?

<sup>1</sup>This revealing (as in verse 16 today and Romans 1:17) is *apokalypsetai* in the Greek, from which we get our word "apocalypse." The book of Revelation is an apocalypse because what John sees and learns is revealed to him by God. Claims of mystery and revelation make many people uncomfortable who like to believe that we can figure out anything worth knowing. But the biblical view is that the very things most worth knowing had to be revealed to us by God.

## *Thru the Bible* Daily Bible Readings

September 3 - 9

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Sunday Esther 1-3; Psalm 119:81-96</b> The story of Esther is set in Persian among the Jews who stayed after the exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem. You may know the king as Xerxes.</p>	<p><b>Monday Esther 4-7; Psalm 119:97-112</b> Where do you see God at work in the story of Esther? This is the only book of the Bible that does not mention God by name.</p>
<p><b>Tuesday Esther 8-10; Psalm 119:113-128</b> Yes, Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms and is devoted to the glory of God's Law. It is an elaborate acrostic - each section begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.</p>	<p><b>Wednesday 2 Timothy; Psalm 119:129-144</b> This brief letter is probably the last of Paul's writings that we have. Paul urges Timothy to stay loyal to Christ, to Paul, and to the true gospel.</p>
<p><b>Thursday A day for reflection and catching up</b></p>	<p><b>Friday Job 1-3; Psalm 119:145-160</b> We the readers know about the wager God makes with the Accuser, but Job, his friends, and family do not. Why do you think God allows the Accuser to inflict so much on Job?</p>
<p><b>Saturday Job 4-6; Psalm 119:161-176</b> Why does the Accuser make a wager with God, a wager he cannot hope to win? Job's friends come to comfort him. Where do they go wrong?</p>	

## Sermon Notes

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**The St. Andrew Academy classes begin in a week!!  
Registration is on-line at [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org)  
Please register today. This will really help us.**

We've completely revamped the Bible Academy. It is now the St. Andrew Academy. We've added lots of new classes and teachers: marriage, parenting, spiritual gifts, missions, and more have been added to our classes on the Bible and spiritual formation. An all-new brochure has been designed and has been mailed to thousands of homes in our area. This is outreach! You can see the class schedule and register on-line at our new website: [www.standrewacademy.org](http://www.standrewacademy.org).

**Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.**

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at [sengle@standrewcccl.org](mailto:sengle@standrewcccl.org).

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

When preparing for this Sunday, I was struck by Peterson's rendering of a line from Psalm 119 - "I'll speak out boldly in public, unembarrassed." It made me think of a book of essays Hugh Hewitt published several years ago, *The Embarrassed Believer*. Hewitt tells his own story of embarrassment at times. It isn't that he was embarrassed by Jesus. Hewitt is a committed believer. But he felt pressured by a culture that wanted him to keep his beliefs private, or at least amorphous and ambiguous. Here is his scale of religious terms from "easy-to-say" to "hard-to-say" in public: "spirituality>belief system>religion>faith>the divine>God>Lord>the Spirit>the Holy Spirit>Christ>Jesus>my savior." The more specific, the more difficult. As Hewitt put it, "It is one thing to believe. It is another thing to be hooted at for belief." He pointed out prayer-in-restaurants as another dilemma. Granted, he lives in California. But I suspect that even here in the so-called Bible Belt, we are not immune to these pressures and feelings.

Hewitt goes on to talk about how we can shed this fear of scorn or embarrassment, but he names a problem that I think many Christians have felt to one degree or another. Have you ever felt this way? Why do you think that Christians sometimes feel this way? Make a list of five specific reasons that a believer might feel embarrassed. (Remember Peter's denial of Jesus if all this makes you feel too guilty.) Have you overcome this fear? If so, how did you do it? If not, how might you go about it? How can we help each other with this? What are some simple steps we could take to make ourselves more bold. Maybe saying grace in restaurants is a good place to start - particularly if it makes us uncomfortable!