

Dear Friends in Christ,

It was an early Monday morning in mid August when the phone rang at the church. The caller was a young woman. She gave me her name and then informed me that she had an outdoor wedding planned for the up-coming Saturday. She stated that it was looking as if the weather might turn bad. She asked if we ever rent out the church for weddings. I told her we didn't do that. She thanked me and we hung up.

On another morning in mid August, one of the funeral directors called the church and said that a gentleman wanted to know if we would have his deceased loved one displayed at the church for a visitation. He did not want a service. The deceased, as well as the relative requesting the visitation, had been a member here years before. Got distracted. Lost interest. Walked away. Were removed. Hence, no visitation. I'm reasonably sure there are many who would scream at the decision.

I started thinking about something I put in front of you in a sermon - also back in August. It was an insight from an article written by Raymond J. Brown. It bears repeating. He referred to "...the gradual loss of Christendom's strength, numbers, quality, and value among the citizenry of our era." The church is, essentially, perceived as an institution that should accommodate whatever people want. Unfortunately, the church has been playing into those wants for some generations.

The church has been busy cascading from one hopeful program to another in a quest for success. A number of churches have succeeded - for a moment. The world has been busy cascading from one **get God out of the picture effort** to another. But the question is, "What does God want?" As you know, it isn't accommodating the world's wants. He wants faithfulness at all costs. So, here we go . . .

ANOTHER MOMENT OF CLARITY

I. The Fight. (6-7)

Paul writes:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (vss. 6-7)

I'm sure you caught the words: "I have fought the good fight." Fight. That just doesn't set well with the vast majority of "church goers" - some here - who diligently work to blend this world's way and thinking into their faith; the pursuit of whatever this world offers, while taking cautious sips from the well of eternal life.

In fact, the Lord had Paul write, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...". (I Tim. 4:1) They might not do that wantonly or knowingly, but in the spirit of unbelief and desire for comfort and acceptance. And Jesus said, '... many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.'" (Matt. 24:10-11)

So there you are. The work of the church isn't about the church fawning over the world and the world adoring it. The work of the church is faithfulness to the Word of God, the Good News of God's love for sinners through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And you...and I...are part of the church.

Clearly, the work of the church is faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ and His call to make disciples by baptizing and teaching everything He has commanded; namely, the Word. The Word! Scriptures. And, again, Jesus was clear: "...many false prophets will arise and lead many astray."

Understand this: we're in a fight. It's a fight with our flesh, this world and Satan. Paul calls it "the good fight - the race." And the Holy Spirit says to every child of God, "let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Heb. 12:1b) And some of you will recall that the Greek word for "endurance" can be translated "agony". Let's make sure we come to terms with this because of what is happening to this world, this country and because of what Paul says next . . .

II. The Crown of Righteousness.

Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (vs. 8)

So, what are we after in this world? How are we investing our lives - our very short moment on this earth? Hopefully, no-one here would think that entrance into eternal life - whatever the age or what a person did not get to do or have of this world - hopefully, no-one here would think that entrance into eternal life might only be a slight improvement over the here and now. In fact, the death of a Christian is - at least, should be - a sermon for the unbeliever. C.F.W. Walther observed:

Death is the most powerful and effective preacher the children of this world have. Though they avoid all churches and despise all preachers of God's Word, yet one preacher - death - they are compelled to hear. His church is the earth, his pulpit the deathbed, the casket, the hearse, the grave, and the cemetery. With a heart-rending voice He cries out, "O man, it is appointed unto you to die; you have no continuing city in this world, this earth is not your home, this life does not finish your course; in an hour unknown to you, you will have to leave this world with all its treasures. Oh, repent, repent!"

And this "crown of righteousness"? Well, remember what Paul says: "...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom. 3:22) For the sake of Jesus, God sees us as His righteous, perfectly holy, people. Through faith. Faith alone.

Here, in this world, we are still sinful and struggle with sin and its earthly consequences. In eternity, because of Christ's righteousness that has been credited to us in this world - in eternity we will be truly, completely, eternally righteous. Without sin! Without its awful consequences! Forever! As Luther said, in heaven we will serve our God "in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally...".

III. It's Where We Want to Be. (vs.18)

And so, Paul writes, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

This moment of clarity impresses upon us that while we might have and enjoy certain features of this world, this world is hardly our main focal point. And I suspect there are those who would think all this is just fine for the aged and those with terminal issues. But I would suggest, if you have the time, to take a walk through a cemetery and note the birth/death dates. Many are quite sobering. And I would suggest we get comfortable with the fact that we are born terminal.

I suspect there are those who would say, "Well the young folks have to..." (what is that ridiculous cliché? Oh, yes!) "the young folks have to sow their oats." If they're Christian they have to face the same eternal realities. Must! Do you recall what Scriptures say to old people, middled aged people, young adults, teens, all children? Do you remember? "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died (as a child of God you're already dead to this world), and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with him in glory." (Col. 3:2-4)

If the death of a Christian is an utter tragedy then Heaven is no improvement and Jesus is a liar because He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." (Jn. 18:36) And He promised to those dismayed by suffering and death, "Let not your hearts be troubled...I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn. 14:1,3)

You see, the church isn't about creating a heaven on earth. It's about the Word of God that consistently points us to, "...the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 6:23) It's the entire direction of everything from Genesis to the end of Revelation and John's plea, "Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20)

And, as far as your life and my life and the lives of our babies, young adults, middle aged and elderly are concerned, who we are and what we are - regardless of age and ability - are bound together in these words:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died (died to this world); and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

We all want to be very, very clear about this! Every moment!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

October 23, 2016

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 18: **“Another Moment of Clarity”**

I. *The Fight.* (vs. 6-7)

II. *The Crown of Righteousness.*

III. *It's Where We Want to Be.* (vs. 18)

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