

Have the courage to be free

Sermon for the 16th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: 2 Timothy 1:7-10

⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...



At the end of the year 1273, there were many earthquakes in the eastern part of Turkey where many people died. Death and fear of death were felt everywhere. At this time, the famous Persian poet, Maulana Rumi, was dying and wrote the following words:

When they lower me deep into the earth on the day of death

You must not think that my heart tarries still on the earth...

Don't let the word "Separation" be heard

when you see my corpse be carried

Because I desire everlasting reunion and to find belonging!

Don't lament 'Farewell, oh farewell!'

when I am put into the grave:

I am happily ready to go beyond the curtain."

In the face of death and great danger, it is difficult to see life after death. It is also difficult to hope. And it is difficult to believe! Death seems to be like a concrete wall. We can't see behind it. We also don't know what will happen after. We only know the suffering in this world. And because we only see this world, we lose ourselves in it. We are again in such a situation today. Many people have lost sight of eternity in the face of the loud cries of death. Therefore, I would like to invite you to see the world with different eyes. I would like to invite you to see what cannot be seen. Life, hope, and faith

which stand above all human experience. Like Maulana, the apostle Paul was trapped in the solid walls of death. He sat in jail and didn't know if he would survive imprisonment. Out of these walls of imprisonment, his song rang out. He sang a song of hope and a song of eternal life. Paul would get to see what is behind the wall of death. What Paul saw is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ and His entire life had taken root deep in the heart of the apostle. In every situation in which he found himself, the living and risen Jesus determined and shaped the life of the apostle. And that's why he calls to his student Timothy and to us. "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God!" It may be that your situation here on earth appears to be very sad! It may be that you have lost hope for life. It may be that you can't find any place on this earth where you can live. It may be that they will throw you in prison in your homeland and torture you.... all these things may happen, but all these experiences cannot take the Lord Jesus away from you!

No one can take the Lord Jesus away because God gave Him to us. When God sends Jesus, He brings life and salvation to us humans. Because God is the beginning and the end of this act, no one can shake it. That's why Paul keeps calling out! God has saved us! God called us through the Gospel. You can't have eternal life and salvation without God. And when people mistakenly thought that they must earn salvation through strong faith or other good works, Paul kept emphasizing: "not because of our works but because of God's work!" Since God makes us free, we are truly free! And that's why Paul is no longer frightened of the world and its many prisons. There is only one thing we must know. We cannot understand or grasp God's call with our human understanding. God's actions also remain hidden for us Christians! We too must experience death. And God also remains hidden to us Christians in the many sufferings of this world. Nevertheless, we don't focus on the fears in this world, but we focus on God. God's call is bigger and stronger than anything else in the world. And it is this call of God that Paul wants to urgently communicate to us. Dear ones, many of you have come to me with many questions. And to be honest, the help that I can give is only a small drop in the ocean and can't do much. I also often notice how helpless I am against the many problems that exist just among us here. And then we haven't even spoken about the many major crises in the world. Perhaps some of you are disappointed because we in the church are so helpless and can't help much. Perhaps some have even already left, saying: the church can't really help me anymore, either. With Paul and with the many other preachers of the Gospel, I would still like to say to you: Help is there! And this help has a name – Jesus Christ! Whoever wants to speak out against all the problems in this world may look to this Christ. This Jesus wants to be there through all our many problems that we have here on earth. That's why He took the prison of this world upon Himself. He also experienced being forsaken by God. Only He knows best how to deal with us and our many fears. This Lord Jesus Christ doesn't just want to be a thought or an example, but He wants to be very close to you. Right there where you have such insurmountable obstacles in your life! Christ wants to be more than a thought or a memory. He wants to be taken along. He wants you to take Him from this church in your heart and carry Him to your house. He also wants to be there where you must experience rejection and scorn from other people. Right there, He wants to be by you and He wants to open your eyes towards heaven so that you can experience His power. In the Garden of Gethsemane, shortly before He was arrested, we can observe this faith in practice. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had great fear. This fear is exactly the same feeling that we all know very well. Christ didn't just fear death. But He also feared the results of death: hell, death, and the devil stood before Him. And we deal with these same enemies. If there is no purpose and no hope to be seen in your life, behind all the hopelessness are the same enemies that stood before Jesus: hell, death, and the devil.

And against such enemies, we can do nothing. The disciples of Jesus were so afraid of these enemies that they ran away in panic. Christ did not flee. He knows He is connected to God even in the deepest distress. Love drives Him into the arms of God. He knows that God loves Him and therefore turns to God. He also knows that all of this has a deeper meaning, even if Satan appears greater than God at the moment! "Thy will be done" ...He says... Paul, who sits in prison, repeatedly refers to this Jesus. He realizes that through His fear and pain, Jesus not only understood people's fear and pain, He also overcame them. The prison sentence, fear of death... all the other things... they have a deeper meaning. Nothing is by chance and at the end there is eternal life. At the end, God stands with His blessing for us. Paul wants to remind his friend Timothy of this. The circumspection, love and courage that Paul wants to give his friend Timothy are not without foundation. Everything has its foundation in Christ. Paul looks to Him. Through Him Paul also receives the Holy Spirit to believe and hope in the hopeless situation. What Paul describes here is the heart of the gospel and is also the identity of the church. That's why we will be at every grave and be there when people are sick or dying. And even if the situation is hopeless, we will keep pointing to this Christ. It is Jesus who overcame death with all its consequences.

I know many of you will now be disappointed. Perhaps you had hoped that we could help you with some situation or another. Naturally we also want to do everything to help people in any earthly need. But unfortunately, I must realize that neither I nor the church has the answer in every situation. I'm sorry if I myself was at a loss in some situations. But in one situation I am not at a loss. And that is when it comes to life. Life that doesn't find its foundation in wealth or earthly power but rather in Christ! This way in Christ is our future. It is also the only foundation that can bring us from this life into the next. I am not ashamed of this Christ! Amen.