

St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor – January 26, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Acts 20:28-35; Titus 1:1-9; Luke 10:1-9

To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you... He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1

Last week I spent a few days at a school for Pastors: our seminary in Ft. Wayne, IN. I was surrounded by pastors: with black skin, white skin, and every shade in-between; from Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas; from very young to pretty old. I met students who weren't pastors yet but would soon receive calls into the Ministry. It was a good background for today's remembrance of Titus, a young pastor who was a friend and occasional traveling companion of the apostle Paul.

Titus was given an important job by Paul: to appoint pastors (elders, he calls them; this is one of several names in the NT for pastors) for the churches of Crete. If you had this job – and perhaps some of you have been involved in choosing a pastor for your church – what criteria would you use? Over the years I have worked with several churches who were looking for a new pastor, and I have seen as top concerns:

- Age (not too old, but not too young, either. 30's – 40's is preferred).
- He must be interesting preacher and teacher (who wants to be bored?).
- He should like children and youth... and get along well with young adults... and young families (if he has one, all the better)... and older people... and be able to relate with the elderly.

Paul seems to have similar concerns. Besides encouraging Titus to choose a family man, he tells him a pastor ***“must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.”*** So: no self-centered, loud jerks! But, mostly, Paul emphasizes – with Titus, and with the pastors of Ephesus he speaks to in Acts 20 – that those who serve as pastors must teach and preach the truth of God's Word. To Titus he says: ***“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”*** He warns the Ephesian pastors: ***“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*** So, they must above all be alert and pay careful attention to their teaching! This is especially how they serve the people.

You also must pay careful attention to God's teaching, for God has made pastors and people for each other. *We go together.* This is the teaching that God would have us see and rejoice in on this Feast of St. Titus.

Look at the teaching, the doctrine, that is proclaimed in today's Scripture readings. First, regarding you... the people, the Church. Jesus calls you His harvest. A harvest is precious to a farmer. He does everything for his crop! He works day and night, day after day, to plant it; tend it; water it; and protect it from weeds and pests. Farming is humble and hard work; and, how hard? Paul says in Acts 20 that ***"God obtained the church with His own blood."*** God shed His blood for you, that He might harvest you and bring you into His barn, His heaven! How precious you are to Him! For this reason, Paul tells pastors to ***"pay careful attention to the flock"*** and work hard for them. They are ***"God's elect,"*** he tells Titus, ones whom God Himself has chosen. As Pastors take this to heart they will learn to love their people and so forgive their sins and overlook their faults. They will be glad to be servants of God ***"for the sake of their faith and their knowledge of the truth."***

So: pastors are servants and you are in charge? You can dictate what your pastor says and does? I thank God that you do not act this way, but I have heard of – and seen – churches in which this has happened. Both the people and their pastor end up suffering.

How are you to view pastors? Well, Jesus appointed His first ones and sent them out to heal the sick and say to them, ***"The kingdom of God has come near to you."*** It was near in them! In their very persons they brought God's kingdom, His rule for their blessing! Paul says in Acts 20 that ***"the Holy Spirit made them overseers."*** Yes, He uses people to do so. Titus was sent to appoint pastors. We have call committees which consider various pastors and then recommend one or two to the congregation, which then votes on who they want. But, it is God who appoints them and works through them. Satan tempts you to see this as a danger to you, as if this makes the pastor a dictator. There are those who have acted this way, aren't there? Yes, pastors are sinners, just like you. That can make it difficult to believe that great things really are happening when they preach, and teach, and baptize, etc. Take to heart what God's Word says, that ***"the Holy Spirit [has] made them overseers"*** and ***"the kingdom of God has come near to you"*** in their ministry. God really is acting through them! Your sins really are forgiven, then! God truly does accept you and come to be with you. He touches you through His pastors!

Believe this, for this is what the Word of God says. It is an incredible word that pastors are blessed to teach and you are blessed to hear. Paul sums up God's teaching with the words that began our Introit this day, which are from his letter to Titus: ***"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."*** (3:4-5) God's goodness and loving kindness appeared in a person: Jesus. And, He is not just a person like us. ***"God obtained [the Church] with his own blood,"*** Paul says. God has blood! Yes, flesh and blood, skin and bone. God came down to man as a man, that by His life, His bloody death and His resurrection He might bring us to God! And now He touches your flesh and blood and makes you holy, filled with the hope of eternal life, through the flesh and blood ministry of His pastors.

This is an awesome teaching. It is a holy teaching, for it is God's teaching. Hear it and believe it, and Christ's holiness is yours! But, hear it with fervency and seriousness. Hold onto it dearly in your heart. For, there are many who twist and contradict God's teaching. Paul warned of their presence even in his day, and there are many more false teachers – **wolves**, Jesus calls them – today.

Last Tuesday I had lunch in the seminary cafeteria and sat beside a pastor I didn't know. It turned out that he is a pastor in the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). He said he came because he loved the clear Biblical teaching that was being presented; teaching which, he said, *"I didn't get in my seminary."* What teaching had we heard that morning? That blood, and the blood of God Himself, was necessary to save us from our sins.

Thursday night I stayed at my brother Bill's house in Canfield, OH. It's a good stopping point between here and Ft. Wayne. We got into a discussion of some of the differences between his church – he belongs to an ELCA congregation – and our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS). Now, Bill is basically a conservative, Bible-believing Christian. We grew up that way. He told me he opposes abortion; and yet the ELCA supports, and even promotes, abortion. I told him that his congregation could be given a pastor who has a same-sex partner or spouse. He knows that God's Word speaks clearly against that.

Tough conversations aren't easy; but they are necessary. Ours took place over a beer and a cigar on Bill's porch, which is far less intimidating than from the pulpit. But, both are necessary. God's holy and saving Word needs to be spoken in both places.

I close with these words of Paul – to Titus, but also to us: ***"hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that [you] may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."*** For the sake of the faith of God's elect people and our knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness and brings eternal life. (Titus 1:1) Amen.