

2 Timothy 1:7-11

ALM joint service 11th Sept 2016

2Ti 1:6 for this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 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, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, 12 which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.

Dear fellow brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

How do you reach a generation who listen with their eyes on the screen and thinks with their feelings? This is one of the many questions I'm battling with. It's easy to give praise and worship here as we sit in the beautiful church with choirs and organ, with loving fellow Christians and good organisation, but as soon as we enter the mission field out there, the picture looks different.

I'm battling with it even more, because I'm a pastor moving around in Christian circles, while you have the privilege of coming into contact with people of all walks of life. You know the "semi-Christians" out there, the atheists, the capitalists or communists. You come into contact with the liberal and conservative, the divorced, the broken-hearted, the greedy, the hungry. You deal with the harsh reality of business and economics and sometimes also with the criminals. Of course sometimes we are tempted to withdraw into the "safe" environment of family and friends here in church. Yet it is the very essence of Christianity to be in the world. I would rather let you talk, than me. You are much more qualified than me to talk about witnessing in the world.

But with the tongue in the cheek, as it happened that a lay-preacher was coming to a church, the pastor approached him and said: I'm the pastor here and you are not; I am good and being paid for it; you are good for nothing.

Anyway, I will attempt to let you see your world and your **work as mission**. I'm not talking specifically as Evangelism (convert people to the Christian belief), but doing God's work in the market place.

I heard a man saying that when asked about what he likes about his job, he answered: well, he likes what he is doing, and he can support his family and even offers some jobs to others, but maybe he should quit his job and do something more meaningful as a fulltime pastor in the church. As a pastor, I should be delighted about his answer, right? But I was more worried, that he was not able to see his business as mission. And with business as mission, I mean (1) doing business as business = inventing, producing, selling and making profit. But it also means that (2) I see my work as calling from God, sending me into a certain environment.

We are all called to participate in the mission of God. Thinking of "Mission", some Christians stop at the concept of planting churches or being a fulltime pastor, or reaching out to a specific group, like our brother Jacob Corzine is doing with student ministry or going out to Mozambique as a missionary. Well, that's definitely included to reach out, but that narrow definition would exclude a whole army of Christians. All Christians are called to participate in God's mission into the world - that includes house wives and husband to build a healthy family; that includes scholars in schools, universities and teachers that include all small and big businesses, gardeners and nurses, mathematicians and ordinary folks that have been retrenched, that even includes lawyers and politicians. If you are connected to Christ, you are connected to the movement that goes out from heaven to earth, that we celebrate on Christmas Eve and Good Friday and Easter Morning and Pentecost; to reach out and bring in the harvest and reconcile the world again with God.

You might ask me how? That's where we need a discussion, a healthy exchange of ideas. For example: You can run your business by great values. Who will provide healthy values and work-ethics for a company? Do we as Christians just sit back and let people do their own thing? No, it's a privilege for Christians if they are still allowed to openly voice their opinion. No company will come to me as a pastor

and request an input for their business-strategy, but they might come to you! Are you prepared when the moment comes to speak up?

Or you can start specific ministries within the business setup to support uplifting programs of not only employees but also communities. You may think that: you don't need to be a Christians to do those outreach programs - and that's correct. At the German school there is momentary a science-week exhibition and it's amazing what is being done by non-believers in communities. But wouldn't it even be greater if committed Christians would be put in charge to run these programs because they trust you, because people see the values in your life, because the company wants reliable persons. We want to influence the world not only because to improve the condition of the community is a human, good reason, but because we as Christian know that God is reaching out to all humans. And God can use the company to put the means in your hands to serve the people. And if you do your work with passion and conviction, don't you think that somebody might notice? And that God might give the community what the community needs through *you* input, through the products - so, sell to people a good product, produce the best on the market. Don't sell them junk or just exploit the people. So a question I would like to put to you is: Can you see your work as a calling?

And that's not very different of what Paul is talking about to his young brother in faith, Timothy. He was indeed called to minister in a congregation. And it just happens to be that even in a congregation you get folks that are driven by cultural standards that are not necessary uplifting. For example, a cultural barrier was in those days: A young man cannot really speak to elders with authority, because he lacks all experiences of life; he's unfamiliar with how the system works; he might even be accused of, like Paul himself was charged off, taking up a ministry for financial gain. As we read here in our text, standing up in a society where also Jews and Greeks were present, it could be very harmful for your image to be associated with someone like the Apostle Paul.

Who is Paul? For some Jews, Paul was a blasphemer; for some Greeks, Paul was an intellectual flaw and even for some Christians in those days, a failure in public speaking. There was a reason, they would say, why Paul was imprison so that he would not "infect" society any more with his preaching. So, why associate yourself with this Paul?

And now Timothy was about to take up a calling. And he is fearful how to proceed.

Not I, but Christ - is the whole Gospel. It's a good thing that you might fear, how and what to do - because it makes you realise that you are dependent on Christ. But first, when are exposed to hostile elements with the congregation or from outside forces, the first emotion that is evoked, is fear. Our first human reaction could be, like they say: flight or fight. Should I run away and withdraw, or should I stand up and fight.

This is where the Christian needs to be immediately reminded: what's all about? Is it about me, that I am scared, that I might be trampled on, that I will experience loss? Will my image be damaged and my future be jeopardized? And if it's all about Me, I and I, then we will do what's in our own interest. But this is where Paul's plea comes in. No, we will not want to react out of fear. It's not about Me! It's about Christ! And suddenly the whole atmosphere seems to change. If it's about Christ, then my next prayer will be: Lord, what now? You have placed me into this situation. Now grant me the wisdom to act as you want me to.

A young man contacted me a few month ago. I was pleasantly surprised, because I married this couple a few years ago, both of them were not from our church and she didn't belong to any church previously. I wanted to join but she hesitated. Doesn't matter now, but he contacted me, and with his permission I may share his story with you. I was heavily criticised at his work by his superior for standing up for people that were dismissed by this boss. I just retrenched anybody who opposed his opinion, most of the personnel were handed a notice of dismissal without even a charge. How should he go about, he asked me?

Well, of cause, there is the law, that should be activated in such unfair dismissals. No, he wanted to know, how should he go about as a Christian? Because, as you know, and Paul and many other letters in the New Testament emphasis, we are also called to take up our yoke, to endure suffering, to just submit as authority is given by God to superiors. And if you rebel against your boss, it might be that you are rebelling against God's authority.

I agree, but, this is where our Christian believe must prove itself to be truth. You have to allow that principles stand next to principles. The principle of taking responsibility of the order of this world is a valid, God-given moral law. At the same time, to submit to authority which is also God-given, is also a God-given moral law. And there is no easy way out. We have to wrestle with these questions. There is no one-answer-fits-all situation. But it helps very much, to clear the mind, if you keep first things first. It's not about me, it's about Christ.

This principle helped us a lot as we put all the options on the table. The young man prayed over it, and at last proceed to sue his boss - not because he wants to take revenge, not to show him who's the strongest, not to teach him a lesson, but because many many family lives were a stake of all those who will still to be dismissed in future.

To make a long story short. He also had to pay the price, finally he was also retrenched - in a sort of nice way, being offered a package. He only accepted because the trial went on; other people took up the legal matters. I can't remember if the boss won his case, but as it so often happens with dirty business, the enemy are not around for long. The directors at last realised with what methods he was working.

And what did this young man do, losing his job that he so much loved to do? He prayed over it and realised, that this is the story of our day - and it should not be. He hooked up with another Christian friend and started his own firm, defending unfair dismissal. The amazing thing however was that he could combine his own experience with his Christian faith, using the tools that the world makes available, the law of the land, and see it as his calling from God, to assist others.

"Don't worry", I told him, "the next crises is around the corner", but never forget, it's not about you or your wonderful abilities, it's about representing Christ, making use of what is given to you.

He doesn't stop talking about Jesus (or at least I hope so). For me, it was just another real life experience of how we Christians are challenged to take our belief seriously.

And the way you walk with Jesus, is the most powerful witness that you can give to anybody around you. You could and you should accumulate some knowledge of the Bible, yes, but in witnessing it is authenticated by your life style.

God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. 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.

The Spirit of power - dynamis, it says in the original Greek, great potential. You might think of dynamite, not in the sense that it provokes an explosion, but in the sense of the dynamite powder, that is so small, seems to be so harmless, so friendly, but if you ignite it, it explodes. Unfortunately dynamite only explodes once, and then it's finished, useless. The power of the Holy Spirit is never depleted, it's never finish. And you can call onto the Lord any time, at any place in any circumstanced. But remember, it's not about you, I, it's about Christ. And He will work his miracles on his terms on his time.

Therefor I like the other descriptions of The Holy Spirit even more. He is the Spirit of love. If you are called to witness, if some comes to you and ask: who are you as Christian? What would you do?

We never answer out of a position of superiority, of domination, of dictation. Christianity is inherent seriously humbling, because we know that everything that we have and what we are, we received by grace, and grace alone.

As we humbled ourselves this morning before the Lord, received forgiveness form God, as we will kneel before the altar to revive Christ body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, we acknowledge we are receiving and receiving. And what we received from God, we transfer to others. God's personality is love towards sinners - and so we will portray love in our witness.

Even if we have to sometimes also highlight to others their mistakes and sins, we do this not in rage and self-satisfaction, but in self-control (sound mind, disipline). The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of self-control.

How I would like to share more stories with you of others, but that you should do amongst each other. We here in Pretoria are so privileged that we have in one service, members of all walks of life. And so this word also comes to us as a unit, as a congregation:

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.

We share in the suffering of our past - social, political and economic suffering, but also in the miracles God has done in our midst. People from all over the country come to Tshwane and engage with us. And believe me, people see our presence here in Arcadia, embassies, international schools, ministers, directors from firms, mission societies from all over the world take notice what we are doing. We might not feature in the 7 o'clock news broadcast, but it might very well be that a TV-camera crew will walk in here one day.

Last year a Radio-broadcast crew walked into the Afrikaans chapel and recorded a church service. The service was broadcast all over South Africa with 1.2 million listeners all over the world.

When the time is ready, God will give the opportunity to witness. This church service, the refreshments we will enjoy afterwards talking to each other, the joint workshops that we present, the wonderful musical talents, the welcoming atmosphere that we create, the house-visits that we do, women's league, maintenance, children's ministry, you name it - all contributes to the joint witness that we give as Lutheran congregation in Arcadia.

A last thought. Does it matter, if my friend does not want to attend this joint service? Yes, it does. It also give witness to the fear people still carry within themselves. There is a lot of fear, and we want to address those fears with love and understanding, with humility but also with boldness that God has granted us a calling. Paul reminds Timothy: The wonder grace and mercy of God is manifested in Jesus Christ - it is visible, touchable, it can be experienced, it is real. Today it is manifested again here in our midst, through the proclamation of his Word and his Holy sacraments. And tomorrow it is manifested in the world through you and me, going out into the world, to live out what we received today. You are called to be what you are: a Christian. Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.