Pastoral Prayer

Creating, redeeming, and sustaining God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; God whose nature is unity in diversity, our world feels so divided, even within families and friendships. Help us be peacemakers in our relationships, building bridges instead of walls. Help us to be better at listening and understanding with humility, allowing Your Spirit to guide our words and actions. May Your peace fill us and be the foundation of every connection.

It's so hard to see the perspectives of others, especially those with whom we disagree. Enlarge our capacity for compassion and empathy. Help us understand the pain and fears of others and walk with them in kindness. May Your love cleanse and refocus our own lives so we become channels of your grace and love, working through us to ease division and heal hearts. Make us one, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Good Deposit

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14 (NRSVUE) *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, 2To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 5I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 6For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, 7for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God, 9who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 12and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day the deposit I have entrusted to him. 13Hold to the standard of sound teaching (tradition) that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.*

* * *

The Word of God for the people of God!

The Lectionary readings today are tied together, not by content but by movement. Lamentations 1 and Psalm 137 are laments from the context of Babylonian exile:

> *How lonely sits the city*
> *that once was full of people!*
> *How like a widow she has become,*
> *she that was great among the nations!*
> *She that was a princess among the provinces*
> *has become subject to forced labor.* (Lamentations 1:1)

"To move from that sadness to the thanksgiving prayer of 2 Timothy 1 is to move from total darkness to *"the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."*[1]

I rarely do verse-by-verse expository sermons; but here we go:

After the traditional Pauline greeting, the writer begins a prayer of thanksgiving: 3*I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did*… Paul always emphasized his continuity with Judaism. A few phrases later we read, *"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice..."* Timothy represents the third generation of faith, so his grandmother Lois would have been a contemporary of Jesus. Her faith would have been Jewish. It is important to understand that neither Paul nor Jesus intended to begin a new religion. Jesus said, *"I did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it" (Matt. 5:17)* and in today's reading

[1] Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV—Year C (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) page 535.

Paul says, *"I worship … as my ancestors did."*

In the Roman Empire, new religions were illegal. The official religion was worship of the empire with the emperor as the focus. But Paul was more concerned with the false teachers of the faith than with the empire (3:1; 4:3).[2]

The particular burr under Paul's saddle was the Judaizers, Jewish Followers of The Way who retained the legalism of some Jewish sects, particularly the Pharisees. Paul's mission field was among Gentiles, and the Judaizers insisted that Gentiles must first become Jews—must submit to the letter of Jewish law. Their particular axe to grind was circumcision. You know: "If we had to submit to it, so should they!"

Paul's message was "the law excludes; grace includes and embraces all." And six times in the epistles, Paul says either, "I am not ashamed," or "don't be ashamed" of the Gospel rooted in the Jewish faith of his ancestors but focused on grace, not law.

So following the prayer of thanksgiving for Timothy's faith, the writer continues: *"I remember you constantly in my prayers."* In the epistles written during his lifetime, Paul always included prayers for his readers. Here, Paul is absent, his martyrdom reverently remembered, but his prayers still giving life and unifying the Christians and ministers of the churches he established. We call it the communion of saints, joining Christians of present and past generations, whose prayers for each other transcend death.[3]

The writer continues: *"Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony…, but join with me in suffering for the gospel…"* The entire New Testament assumes that Christian faith will bring one into conflict with the dominant values of the culture.[4] The prophets were stoned, Jesus was crucified, Paul was executed as was Dietrich Bonnhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and the list goes on and on. And although on occasion the state has been the instrument of death, the impetus almost always emerges out of disagreements over matters of faith.

Disciple minister, Derek Penwell, writes, "Biblically, the prophets weren't chaplains to empire or pastors to kings, but were the conscience of state. They rejected any confusion of God's shalom with empire's stability. When leaders traded justice for control, prophets said so. They warned that people who abandon truth will be mocked among the nations, not because God delights in anyone's humiliation, but because contempt are the cultural exhaust fumes of sustained injustice."[5]

Justice is not political; it is at the heart of biblical spirituality. And those who confront embedded injustice will suffer.

Verses 8-10 are a summary of Paul's gospel—the good news of *"…the power of God,*

[2] Craddock, Fred B.; Boring, M. Eugene Boring. *The People's New Testament Commentary* (p. 668). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., page 669.
[5] Derek Penwell, September 26, 2025. Facebook

[9]***who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,*** [10]***but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."***

There is no secret knowledge in Christianity; the purpose and grace of God are now revealed. The opening lines of Ephesians include, ***"(God) has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."*** (1:9-10) This is a major theme in Paul: in Christ God is revealing the divine nature and purpose for all creation, and that divine nature and purpose is grace.

Then comes the call, and it's at three levels: [13]***Hold to the standard of sound teaching*** (and the word is λογων)… [13]***Hold to the standard of*** λογων ***you heard from me…*** [14]***Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.***

As an apostle, Paul was entrusted with the gospel, which he in turn entrusts to Timothy, who entrusts it to others.[6] So "***Guard the good deposit entrusted to you…"*** In the original language, the word deposit is *παραθηκην (paratheke)*, sometimes translated "treasure": "***Guard the good 'treasure' entrusted to you…"***.

The word is a synonym for "sound teaching, (λογων)" but translated here as "deposit" it implies growth, as a bank deposit draws interest. It's used only three times in the New Testament, twice in today's reading and once in 1 Timothy, each time accompanied by the verb "guard" or "keep." The image is of a deposit of sacred tradition (λογων) given to someone for safekeeping, not just for his or her own spiritual welfare but to be a faithful steward of the logon depositing it to grow and passing it on to future generations.

Pulling it all together we have a 14-verse summary of the entire biblical message. All of God's intentions and purposes; indeed, God's very nature has been revealed in Jesus, and that revelation is a sacred treasure deposited into the lives of people God calls and empowers to guard and keep the treasure as it grows in the lives of generation after generation of God's human creatures.

We call it the communion of saints; a timeless and universal community recognizing a divine mystery in the diverse languages and spiritual stories of every ethnicity, every culture, every gender and sexual identity across every generation since God said, "Let us make humans in our own image." The recognition and acceptance of that divine mystery at whatever level of understanding we have at a given moment is the treasure—the 'good deposit'—we bring, as we gather at the Lord's table.

[6] Ibid.

Invitation to the Table

One of the things that excites me about church history is that the church of the first two centuries believed that Christ's church stands for a radical inclusion of all people. Period. We're all God's children. They believed that all those barriers we as humans work so hard to build, God in Christ broke through. Not even death on a cross could stand against the love and grace of God.

I grew up in a church that built those barriers and focused its work on maintaining them. Even the Lord's table was a barrier We had communion once a quarter, and people who were not members of that congregation were asked to leave.

Today is World Communion Sunday. It was started in a Presbyterian Church in 1933. In the church where I grew up, I never heard of it.

One thing that excites me about World Communion Sunday is my mental image of a wave sweeping around the globe through each time zone—a wave that breaks down barriers as Christians gather at tables to celebrate the grace and love than cannot be contained.

Our Communion Hymn is #390, "When You Do This, Remember Me."

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. **(I CORINTHIANS 10:15-16 NRSV)**