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St. Timothy, Pastor and Confession

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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“Them’s Fightin’ Words!”

Text: 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Matthew 24:42-47; Acts 16:1-5

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

St. Timothy, pastor and confessor. That is the day we are commemorating this day. But according to St. Paul, we could call Timothy something else today: St. Timothy, *fighter* and confessor. For, he told Timothy, **“Fight the good fight of the faith.”**

Not many people think of pastors as fighters. It’s not the first thing that comes to mind. But that is front and center before us today, and, I think, a good thing for us to consider. That a pastor fights for his people.

He fights for them against sin, against false knowledge and false belief, against pride, against despair, against *all* the attacks and assaults of the evil one. In doing so, in fighting these things, at times it may seem as if he is fighting against you, so imbedded in our nature are these things. But no, **the wise and faithful servant** is simply giving his flock **their food at the proper time**. The food of God’s Word, both Law and Gospel, at their proper times. The good confession of Jesus Christ, that the wiles and schemes and seductive ways of satan be defeated.

It is not easy. You know that. For you fight this battle as well. Every day. Fighting the temptations that satan hurls at you. Fighting his lying voice that tells you you’re not worthy to be a Christian. Fighting both pride and despair - sometimes at the same time, so crafty are his assaults. You know how hard it is. Which is why it is good to not be alone. To have someone fighting for you.

It was hard for Timothy. He was the pastor Paul placed over the churches in Ephesus, where the worship of the goddess Diana was centered; where her temple was. And because of that, the cult of Diana was tied deeply to commerce, to government, to social life - to just about everything in Ephesus. And so to make the good confession, to fight the good fight of the faith, was not an easy one for Timothy. The good confession was not a harmless, optional teaching, but one that effected and threatened every area of Ephesian life. In the end, it got him martyred. And in the meantime, I’m sure he got tired and frustrated and fearful, and wondered if he was doing any good at all.

And so Paul writes to him and the church these letters of encouragement, to remind and strengthen him. To remind him of his baptism, and that he find encouragement in the promises made to him there. To remind him of when they started out together, when Timothy made the good confession in his circumcision - circumcised not because he had to be, but a confession in his flesh of love for those who did not know Christ. And to encourage him in how the Lord worked through him before, as he preached the same Word and fought the same fight. To remind him that the fight is actually not ours at all, but Christ's.

Which is a good thing! A very good thing. Because no pastor - whether his name be Paul or Timothy or Peter or James - has the strength, the endurance, the wisdom, or the ability to fight this good fight of the faith on their own. Either for themselves or for others. The satanic foe is simply too much for us fallen human beings. But he is not too much for Christ.

And so Paul reminds Timothy of this, when ***Christ Jesus made the good confession before Pontius Pilate***. By the standards of the world, things weren't looking too good at that time. Jesus confessed that He was a king (John 18:37), but if He was, He was a defeated and humiliated king. Jesus confessed that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), but what other kinds of kingdoms are there - imaginary ones? And Jesus said that Pilate had no power over Him that hadn't been given to Him from above (John 19:11), but it sure didn't look that way, as Jesus stood before Pilate with a crown of thorns on His head, with His back torn open by lashes, with His hands bound with Roman ropes.

But those few words of Jesus were not the good confession before Pilate that Paul was talking about - it was rather what we just confessed in the Creed: *that He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate*. It was on the cross where Jesus confessed the love and power of God for us sinful creatures as He laid down his life for us. As He took the sin of the world upon His shoulders, and paid its awful price. As He fought for us against the old evil foe . . . *and won when He died*. We usually don't think of death as victory, but when death devoured Jesus, it swallowed a prize it could not keep. And so the victory won in His death we see in His resurrection on the third day, that the power of sin, the power of death, and the power of the devil have all been broken. Broken by the life of Christ. The life of Christ now given to you.

Given to you not when our Lord *opens His hand to give you your food at the proper time* - as we pray in our table prayer; but when the **side** of our Lord was opened on the cross, and out flowed the water and the blood (John 19:34). For it is the water of Christ in Holy Baptism that gives us the life of Christ in His death and resurrection. It is the body and blood of Christ in His Holy Supper that gives us the life and forgiveness of Christ won on the cross. For it is the Word of Christ Himself that gives these simple things their power. The power of the Word made flesh - born

for you, crucified for you, raised for you, and now given to you. Given to you who are weak, that you be strong.

And therefore, strong you are! Strong, for these are the weapons that fell your enemy. Weapons that may look weak and foolish to the eyes of the world, but you know are not.

And so with these, Timothy fights the good fight of the faith. With these, pastors fight the good fight of the faith. Making the good confession of Christ by relying on them, and not on any of our own human ingenuity, wisdom, leadership, strength, charm, charisma, or any such thing. To rely on such strengths is to be weak. But to rely on the weakness of Christ is to be strong.

That's not always easy to remember. And you know how easy it is to look for strength, love, and acceptance in the things and people of this world instead of in Christ. And of this you need to repent. And of this pastors need to repent. Why? Not just because this is sinful and wrong, but because when you repent, you are strong. Strong with Jesus' death and resurrection. For to repent is to die to yourself, to your sinful ways, to your sinful words, to your sinful desires, and then to rise to a new life in Christ. A new life in His forgiveness. A new life that satan cannot take away. For it is beyond His reach. It is of Christ and His victory, and so of it you can be sure.

And so armed with that Word and promise of life, you are strong. For you have a strength not of this world. A strength to fight and make the good confession of Christ now, laying down your life for others. It will never be easy, but it is good. ***The good fight of the faith.***

And so it is good that you are not alone in this fight; that God has given *pastors and confessors*. Pastors who fight for you and confess Christ by giving you His forgiveness and life. By pouring over your head and placing into your mouth the things of the king and the kingdom not of this world - for if they were of this world, what good would that be? This world is passing away. And how easily the kingdoms of this world can be shaken and taken, as Haiti showed us yet again. No, you receive and are citizens of a kingdom far, far better, that cannot be taken away.

When the master will come and take us to be with Him there we do not know. But neither do we need to know. Rather, we are ready and watch for our Lord's final appearing - His final *epiphany* - as we come and receive Him as He comes to us here, is this epiphany now. His appearing in water, words, and bread and wine. For here, in these things, we ***take hold of the eternal life*** that has taken hold of us. Here ***we make the good confession of Jesus.*** Here we ***pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness,*** for here we receive those

things from their very source.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have always given to Your Church on earth faithful shepherds such as Timothy to guide and feed Your flock. Make all pastors diligent to preach Your holy Word and administer Your means of grace, and grant Your people wisdom to follow in the way that leads to life eternal; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Commemoration of St. Timothy)

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.