

NOTE: This sermon preached for an online Matins service when the Blizzard of 2016 caused us not to be able to have the Divine Service in Vienna.

24 January 2016
St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Good Confession”

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

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

I don't know if Paul, any of the other apostles, or any other of the first generation of pastors which came after them, like Timothy, had to deal with snow and blizzards. Though I suspect they did. In some of the higher elevations of Asia Minor, they may have had to change their plans because of the weather.

But that's nothing new. We read about the weather effecting God's people all through the Scriptures, from the flood in Noah's day, to drought in the days of Elijah, to storms at sea for Paul. Sometimes God uses the weather to exercise His judgment, and sometimes for the benefit of His people, but at other times it's just creation being creation, and something for us to marvel at. And to be thankful for the warm and safe homes our Lord has so graciously given to shelter us.

But in the readings that we heard today, there is another kind of dangerous storm that is really being spoken of - **the dangerous storm of false doctrine**. That was the real battle the apostles and those who came after them had to battle. A battle that is still going on today. And in the midst of that storm, the Lord has graciously provided homes to shelter us and keep us safe - our home which is called the Church. A place where we might be protected from the dangers around us: to be warmed by the truth in a cold and selfish world, and to be fed by our Lord's Word and Sacraments.

And that is the picture Jesus gives the twelve as He teaches them, as we heard in the Holy Gospel. Jesus speaks of *the master of the house*, and *the wise and faithful servant . . . the master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time*. Jesus spoke those words to the twelve just a couple of days before His crucifixion, as they were having some time alone on the Mount of Olives. He is going to set them over His house, His Church, to care for them and feed them. The thief is going to be out there, lurking around, *storming* around, trying to steal from the Church - both her truth and her sons and daughters. So they must stay awake and be alert for him, and for the storms that will come. Like the forecasters that have flooded our ears with warnings all this past week,

Jesus warns them of what is coming. And while our blizzard lasted only a couple of days and has come to an end, they will not know how long their storms will last; how long it will be till Jesus comes again.

So with this admonition of Jesus, and after they receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the twelve begin to preach, and as we heard in the reading from Acts, ***the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.*** And as they did, as the Church continued to grow, the apostles had to themselves do what Jesus had done - appoint servants over the houses, over the Churches; pastors to care for them and feed them in the midst of the worldly and doctrinal storms raging all around them. And one of those Paul appointed was Timothy.

Timothy was from a mixed-marriage home, like so many today. His mother was a Jewish believer, but his father was a Greek and, so it seems, an unbeliever. Paul hand picks Timothy for this work, which perhaps made his mother proud and his father not so much. So maybe even early on there were storm clouds gathering in Timothy's own house. And so Timothy accompanied Paul for some time, but then, according to tradition, Timothy was left to care for the Church at Ephesus. And if Washington, DC and this area was the bullseye for this storm, you could say that Ephesus was the bullseye of many a doctrinal storm that arose in those days. It was a city rife with false teaching and false religion.

But the greater the storm, the greater the need for the shelter and truth of the Church. Maybe we need to learn that in our country and its cultural climate today. Instead of wringing our hands as our culture continues to slide away from the truth of God's Word, perhaps we need to be aware that with that, more and more *opportunities* abound - as more and more people are left out in the cold, are being buried under a blizzard of false teaching, and are starving for the truth. We have a shelter for them here. We have food for them here. We have hope for them here.

And so as Timothy labored to care for that house, that Church, Paul wrote to encourage him in his work. For it is easy to get discouraged, to look out the window at the blizzard raging all around us in fear and trepidation. So Paul encourages Timothy, and us. ***Fight the good fight of the faith.*** Don't give up. ***Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness . . .*** and not just for himself, but for the flock, for the Church. As their pastor. To shelter them and feed them and care for them. To continue ***to make the good confession,*** which Timothy had done before ***in the presence of many witnesses*** - perhaps a reference to his ordination. We don't know how long the storms will last, Paul says. But we know they will one day end, at ***the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . at the proper time.***

At the proper time . . . which means it will be no accident. Jesus will come again exactly as planned. And then the storms will end, when the Son shines again over all creation.

But until that time . . . well, Paul says something ominous to Timothy. ***Make the good confession***, he says. Preach the good confession, *just as Jesus did before Pontius Pilate*.

But you know the story - that good confession got Jesus crucified. And it seems to have gotten Timothy stoned and clubbed to death as well, as it had led to the martyrdom of Paul and ten of the twelve disciples - the only exceptions being Judas, who killed himself, and John, the only one to die a natural death. The satanic thief does not like the good confession.

Yet the good confession cannot be silenced. For the One who is preached, and the One who preaches today through His servants, *defeated death*. And so while the good confession may make the thief and world rage, **it leads to life and gives life**. In the midst of the storms of sin it gives forgiveness. In the midst of the darkness of false doctrine it shines the light of truth. In the midst of death it raises to life. **For the good confession is Jesus**. And it is Jesus who is really the good and faithful servant, caring for and feeding His Church - *through His servants*. They will die but He will not. They may stumble and fall but He will not. And as they speak and give, it is really Jesus speaking and giving. For it is His Word and His gifts . . . and His life.

So as we give thanks today for Timothy, we give thanks also for all pastors who have cared for us and fed us in the past, those who will do so in the future, and the One - Jesus - who is really working through them all.

And that even as the good confession is made here, so it may sound throughout the world, and in our homes too. As all of us go out into the storms of this world and life, into our callings, and confess to those around us. Shoveling, plowing, through the lies and half-truths dumped around us. *Confessing Jesus* - His life, His hope, His truth. Blessed are those who hear. Blessed are those who speak. Blessed are you, in Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.