

## **SERMON – 5/6/22**

Titus 1:1-4

“At the right time [God] revealed [eternal life] in His message. This was entrusted to me, and I proclaim it by order of God our Saviour.” (Titus 1:3)

Over these last days we have been marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Queen's reign and in so doing we have been focussing on not only on the day of accession or the day of coronation, nor even only on the 70 years of service as Queen or the 96 years of her life, but on the long history of nation and monarchy in which she and her forebears and heirs stand as links in a chain. In that context as I turned to this morning's Bible reading, I was struck by the appearance in those four short verses of three significant words relating to time that connect every individual moment of time (the Greek word is 'kairos') and the passage of time (the Greek word is 'chronos' from which we get our word chronology) with the eternal purposes of God (the Greek word is 'aionios' from which our word aeon comes).

And as we begin to read and reflect on this Letter to Titus over the summer, I want to begin this morning by making the connection between eternity and the here and now of this moment in which we gather, the proclamation of the eternal Gospel in this and every moment. The Word of God which contains the good news of the salvation that God has won for us in Jesus Christ is not some precious stone that needs to be kept under lock and key like the crown jewels, it is a working diamond whose job it is to make us more Christ-like. That is why I am particularly fond of the pastoral letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, Titus and Philemon and of the opening and closing sections of the letters to the churches where personal references and details are common. It is there that we find out what God does in ordinary people's lives through the eternal Gospel.

I would like to think with you this morning about the two individuals that we are introduced to at the beginning of this letter – Paul himself, who is writing, and Titus, to whom the letter is addressed. We get a glimpse here of what the Gospel has made these men and we are challenged to consider what we are

letting it make of us, what we are allowing the eternal God to do with us in the moment.

Paul introduces himself as 'a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ' – and even those few relatively simple words give way to reveal a tremendous depth of character. It sounds quite humbling to be described as a 'servant of God' and it is no accident, I'm sure, that the Queen signed her jubilee message to us as 'your servant'.

The word that Paul uses to describe himself is actually the word slave. He is not in a plum job in the service of the King of kings – he is enslaved, he is in submission to his royal Master. As Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians, we are not our own, we are bought with a price. In the language of the slave market, we are redeemed, no longer in slavery to ourselves and our sinful human nature but in a new kind of slavery which is, in reality, perfect freedom, life in all its fulness – we are enslaved to God. That is the description with which Paul chooses to introduce himself and it reveals where his true loyalty lies – not somehow standing up for himself or writing from his own perspective but very firmly in submission to God his Saviour.

The other title that Paul uses to describe himself is the word 'apostle.' Given that the qualification for being an apostle was to have been commissioned to go out with the Gospel message by the risen Lord Jesus Himself, there were relatively few who could claim that title for themselves, but Paul did not become an apostle in the same way as the others had done because unlike the Twelve who had followed Jesus during His earthly ministry, Paul had been a persecutor of the early Church and had only come to faith when he was famously stopped in his tracks by an appearance of Christ Himself on the road to Damascus. Paul never forgets that an apostle is simply a messenger, an envoy of Christ and that it is the *message*, the *content* of the Gospel that is to be exalted, not the bearer of that message.

Everything that he is as an apostle and everything that he speaks is from God – he describes it here as being about a faith that God inspires, a knowledge that God reveals, about a hope of eternal life that God gives and he emphasises that *God* does not lie; that *God* promises; and that *God* brings His Word to light through

what is preached – that is an awesome thought for preacher and congregation alike – *God* is the One who saves. The apostle (or the preacher for that matter) who offers their own opinions or who draws their own conclusions from their study of the world around him is no apostle at all. We can offer only what comes from God Himself, we can offer only Christ and the certainties of His Word. While it's important to preach into a specific context and vital to understand that context as fully as we can, if we offer *only* that, then we are offering nothing of lasting significance. If we offer *only* Christ, then we are offering everything – faith, salvation, eternal life. A knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. Such is Paul, then – slave and apostle in the true biblical senses of these words.

What about Titus? Well, Paul describes him as his 'true son in our common faith.' It may well be that it was through Paul's preaching that Titus came to faith in Christ and what joy it must have given Paul to see this young man grow in faith and understanding to such an extent that Paul could entrust him with a job that he would have done himself had time permitted, straightening out what he had left unfinished in Crete and to appoint elders in every town there as we will see next week, God-willing.

In fact, Titus seems to have been particularly gifted by God, from what we can glean of him elsewhere in the New Testament – wherever an important or difficult or significant task needed done, Titus is there in the thick of it. Paul had to pay a tricky visit to Jerusalem to debate with the Jewish Christians over whether the Gospel should be offered freely to the Gentiles without requiring them to become Jews first, and Titus is one of the folk Paul chooses to go along with him (Gal. 2:1). It was Titus who was given the task of delivering the Second Letter to the Corinthians with all its challenging teaching and rebukes (2 Cor.8:16) – he would have had the difficult job of backing up what Paul had written, explaining what the apostle meant and doubtless taking some of the flak from it face to face. Titus was entrusted with the job of organising the collection for the poor of the church in Jerusalem. Titus was a believer; Titus knew what Jesus Christ had done for him and that he was under and obligation to devote himself to the spreading of the Gospel. He

too was enslaved; he too was sent out as a messenger not just with words but with actions which were a reflection of what Jesus Himself had done. The Christian flock in Crete needed pastors, shepherds to keep them in the way of Christ – Titus knew the Good Shepherd and took his pattern from Him. The Church in Corinth needed to be steered away from false teaching and Titus brought both rebuke and tender care in imitation of Christ. The Christians in Jerusalem were suffering – Titus enabled the relative wealth of the believers in Corinth and Macedonia to be shared in the way that Jesus taught. He was living out the eternal Gospel in the here and now.

So that brings us to ourselves here (in Kinross) and now (in the 71<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth). Like Paul and Titus, and indeed like the Queen, we are called to be servants – slaves even – and we are sent as messengers to reveal to a needy world the eternal life of God's Kingdom, and to further one another's faith until our knowledge of the truth leads to godliness. More than at any point in our lifetime the Gospel of Christ needs to be lived out so that a new generation may enter into life in all its fulness.

God has an eternal plan and He is involving us in allowing that plan to find fulfilment in this particular moment in eternity through something as simple as sharing and passing on what we have received.

Don't let the truth remain tied up in the Book – in following Christ, let the Word of God have its way with you. History tells us of the achievements made by folk like Paul and Titus in the advance of the Kingdom of God – *they* tell us that it was not anything in them that brought about those accomplishments but only as they submitted to God as servants, proclaimed the message and shared their faith. Now, that is something that all of us can do – what will history write about us, I wonder? My prayer is that it will recognise and proclaim how it was the truth of God that led to godliness in us and brought about such an advance of God's Kingdom in this part of the world that much praise would be given to His name as a result.