

2 Timothy 4:1-5

October 3, 2010 – PENTECOST 19 – Stewardship Sunday

Fight the Good Fight of Faith In the Presence of God

✠ **Be prepared** (vv.1-2)

✠ **Keep your head** (vv.3-5)

In the name of Jesus, our Savior and our Judge, dearly redeemed servants of God:

It was one of those split second instincts that I lived to regret. One moment a few college classmates and I were horsing around. The next I was looking down where I had flipped the one on top the other. My reaction did not fit the friendly fun they were having. And all during my year off from college I wished I could undo the hurt in their eyes. Where was **the Good Fight of Faith**?

Timothy had the opposite problem. Earlier in this second letter, Paul wrote: **“God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”** (1:7 NIV) Sometimes we can be too laid back, too mellow as gentlemen for Christ. We all need to be called up by our diving Commander to **Fight the Good Fight of Faith – In the Presence of God**. Fighting in God’s **Presence** makes all the difference between doing good or doing harm. **The Presence of God** is what we need to...

✠ **Be prepared** (vv.1-2)

This text will always remind me of five years ago on my first trip to China. After teaching 7-8 hours a day for a week, my voice needed rest. Then came a knock on the door, and one of the coworkers said, “You come to Seminary and teach.” “I was told to rest today; now I’m in my street clothes.” “No matter. Mary says, ‘You teach.’” For half a mile I wondered what. At the lectern I was told: “You teach Corinthians. We want Greek too.” Thankfully, God prepared me writing *The Preacher’s Apprentice*.

Later that evening at dinner it sounded as if we would be on our own. Just when I thought I’d work on my sermon for Sunday, Mary turned to me again: “Tonight we have presentation on *Relationships*. You speak.” My startled look earned a little scolding: “You told the students in Corinthians class to always be prepared.” I had twenty minutes to get ready for Chinese coming in off the street to hear about *Relationships* through an interpreter. Fortunately, my daughter Katie had suggested I prepare pictures of family and friends back home. On the thirteen hour flight I had assembled a PowerPoint of “My Family, My Work and My Best Friend.” It was a natural way to lead them to Christ. Once again I had to thank Him for helping me **Be prepared**.

How about you? How can you always **Be prepared**? Mostly it won’t be in public like this. But a neighbor, a hunting buddy, friends in your club or kids at school – someone is bound to ask you. “Why do you seem so happy?” Or, “How can you be so at peace with what you’re going through?” Stewardship of time is vital. If you’re letting your light shine, people will wonder about the source as you reflect the light of God’s Son Jesus Christ. That’s why Paul writes to Timothy, **“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom....”**

With the eyes of faith we see Jesus coming on Judgment Day. We know His kingdom will last forever. And we know that sin-dead souls need to rise to life now or else the Last Day will bring eternal terror. Paul is so serious: **“I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage....”** Can you see the only way you will be ready to know what to say, i.e., to **“Preach the Word”**? It may not be publically from a pulpit or in a classroom, yet Jesus says to all His disciples: **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8) Don’t expect tongues of fire like the first Pentecost. But the Holy Spirit still comes on God’s people with power

through His chosen tools, the Gospel in Word and sacraments. How else could we always **Be prepared** to “*correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction*”? If you’re holding God at arm’s length or just getting enough of God’s Word to get by, who will tell the friends, relatives, associates and neighbors whom God has given you? Charging up your spiritual batteries in the daylight is the way God helps you in the night. **Be prepared** and...

✠ **Keep your head** (vv.3-5)

Literally it says, “Be sober,” or “free of intoxicants” like wine and heady human pride. John the Baptist is a good example. He did not hesitate to tell King Herod: “*It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.*” (Mark 6:18 NIV) Remember what happened? The daughter of Herodias did her birthday dance for the drunken king. At her mother’s advice the girl requested, “*the head of John the Baptist on a platter.*” Jesus warned His disciples, “*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.*” (John 15:18f NIV) Timothy, **Keep your head** even if like John you could lose your head. Body and soul, we belong to God.

Once a local pastor was asking me about what we teach. As soon as I started to answer, he got red in the neck, held up his hand and said, “That’s doctrine. We don’t need to talk about that.” Similarly on vacation when a man asked, I answered, “We’re not like the Lutherans you read about in the paper. We still believe the Bible.” “Okay!” he interrupted. “That’s the end of that conversation.” Even world renowned evolutionists are very patient and condescending to church people until you tell them you believe the world is only a little over 6,000 years old as the Bible says. Then they come up short on tolerance. God’s Word nailed it. Now is the time “*when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*” While they blame the Bible as myth and legend they turn to impossible myths like the “Big Bang.”

If only our problems were outside the church! But it didn’t work that way for Jesus, did it? Religious authorities known as Scribes and Pharisees had Jesus executed by the Romans. Even Pontius Pilate the Roman governor could see it was for envy. Christ saw it a thousand years earlier: “*You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them....*” (Psalm 88:8 NIV)

One example will suffice. New Life members have a reputation for caring. Believing the Bible, we cannot agree with the social gospel that says, the church’s highest priority is “to improve people’s circumstances here on earth.” We cannot accept the notion that “the non-ethical practices and beliefs of Christianity nearly all center on the winning of heaven and immortality,” or that “the kingdom of God can be established by nothing except righteous life and action.” God’s kingdom is not our work, but God sends His Holy Spirit in the Word to rule our hearts and lives by the Gospel of forgiveness. What lover of God’s Word could agree with the statement: “Doctrine divides, service unites”? Sadly these quotes are from a book by Alabama businessman Millard Fuller who founded Habitat for Humanity.

Pointing this out won’t make you popular. We **Fight the Good Fight of Faith – In the Presence of God.** “*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*” Jesus suffered hardship and endured the shame of the cross to bring us the Good News of sins forgiven, heaven won, an eternal habitat with God forever in bliss. Repentance is the key that unlocks the door. The Good News of Jesus our Savior turns on all the lights. Here is shelter from the storm. Here is power to fulfill all the duties of your calling with joy in the Lord and honest love for your fellow man. If one way won’t work because of false doctrine, love finds another way. Many of our WELS members rolled up their sleeves with the Committee on Relief rebuilding homes after Hurricane Katrina. **Fight the Good Fight of Faith – In the Presence of God** means sharing the Gospel and living the Good News that God loves us all. **The Good Fight of Faith** is the only **Fight** that brings life and health and peace. We manage our time, talent and treasure for the glory of the God who gives every good and perfect gift, especially sound doctrine and forgiveness eternal. Amen.

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New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126