

Titus 1:1-9 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. 5

[Today], January 26th, has been celebrated as the Festival of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor. For those not familiar with the celebration of saints days, it may seem as if we're focusing in on the saint and losing focus on the Savior. But if you follow the lessons and listen to the message this morning, you'll find that the life of St. Titus could be the life of St. You or St. Me. For our lives are but flawed canvasses on which God lovingly paints the beautiful masterpiece of his grace. And so, as we celebrate the festival of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor, please...

Dear Christian Friends,

How does this sound to you?

The cradle of European Civilization...its genuinely friendly people, welcome you and ... promise you a truly memorable Mediterranean travelling experience.

Whether your visit is for relaxation or to explore and discover the many well-known and countless hidden treasures ... you will not be disappointed by the diversity of the landscape – the rugged mountains, the endless beaches and the turquoise seas, the many cities, towns and villages, and stunning countryside. Live the essence and the heartbeat of the Island from dawn till dusk and discover.....

That's 21st century Crete. Sounds beautiful, adventurous, inviting, doesn't it? Or at least it does to me.

But now how does this sound?

- Dominated by Rome
- Warring city states
- A reputation for lacking ethical principles, stealing and harboring robbers and pirates.

That's 1st century Crete. In fact, the Greek historian Polybius described the island's inhabitants this way: "...with few exceptions you can find no habits prevailing

in private life more steeped in treachery than those in Crete." Even the Apostle Paul piled on by quoting another Greek writer by the name of Epimenides when Paul wrote to Titus *Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."* ¹³ *This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.* (Titus 1:12, 13) That could be labeled as "inspired stereotyping" by the Apostle Paul, so it must have been bad.

Yet this is the place to which Paul sent Pastor Titus. And not just to preach the gospel, but to do some major church upgrades for the handful of congregations on Crete. I have to admit, it doesn't exactly sound like a relaxing vacation on a beautiful Mediterranean island in the sun.

But in many ways, Titus was an obvious and fitting choice. Raised a Greek pagan, Titus was an adult convert who became a disciple of Jesus. Tradition holds him to be one of the 72 sent out to the villages of Palestine in our Gospel Lesson for today. And later, Titus became a trusted companion of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles.

Paul had a profound respect for Titus, referring to him as *"my true son in our common faith."* Though Titus is not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, he was noted in Galatians where Paul writes of journeying to Jerusalem with Barnabas, accompanied by Titus. Titus was then dispatched to Corinth where he was to be the bearer of a severe rebuke for causing scandal and wavering from the faith. Further, Titus was called on to put their charity to the test and gather alms for the struggling church in Jerusalem.

By God's grace, Titus was equal to the task. To further make use of his gifts as a mission-minded peacemaker and administrator, Paul left Titus on Crete to serve as its Bishop and, according to Paul's letter to Titus, *straighten out what was left unfinished...appoint[ing] elders in every town.*

I have to admit, though, that I wonder which was harder on Titus:

confessing his faith to the corrupt and pagan society in which he found himself, or pastoring several flocks while training up elders, what we would today call pastors, who could live up to Paul's inspired expectations: *An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.* ⁷ *Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.* ⁸ *Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.* ⁹ *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.*

As a pastor, I have to admit, those words are daunting, especially that big word right at the start - *blameless*. And the truth is I don't always live up to the expectations, as you well know. Like Titus, like Paul, "I am by nature sinful." On my own, I have no business doing this job, shepherding you God's people. I deserve God's "punishment now and in eternity" not the opportunity to "confess [Jesus'] name as long as [I] live."

And the truth is, it is the same for you. Maybe you weren't called to be a pastor or a teacher, but you are called to let your light shine. You, the one who breaks into a cold sweat every time you have to pray in public. You, the one who would rather say nothing about what you believe to save face than to offer eternal peace to a co-worker to save them for eternity. You, the one who comes to church to check a box but then for the sake of convenience boxes up your faith for the rest of the week. Yeah, you. No, the truth is, we have no business, do we, holding forth the cross of Christ. I have no doubt that Titus had similar thoughts. We all do.

But look at what Paul wrote to Titus a little later in chapter 3, *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,* ⁵ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because*

of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ *whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ⁷ *so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

That's why Paul, who called himself the "chief of sinners" could open his letter to Titus and to all of us with such spiritual, such eternal confidence, *Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness--* ² *a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,* ³ *and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.*

In other words, it *is* our business – yours and mine, God has *made* it our business in the face of who are by nature and in view of who have become in Christ. It *is* our business to confess his name, to shine the light of Christ, and to hold forth his cross in this sin-darkened world. He who has saved us from the deadly results of our sin, has now offered us "light and life" "both now and in eternity." His grace is our greatest joy. His promise is our certain hope. And now he calls on us to give thanks for his precious gift by entrusting to us this very same message of great joy and certain hope for the salvation of others.

I know, most of the world is a lot more like 1st century Crete than the 21st century tourist destination. Confessing Christ is not easy. It comes with moments of doubt and fear. But remember what Paul was inspired to write to the Corinthians: *God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.* (1 Corinthians 1:9) So, *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be [men, women, and children] of courage; be strong.* ¹⁴ *Do everything in love.* (1 Corinthians 16:13) And confess his name as long as you live. Amen.