

Grace to Witness

- ✦ with character of servants (vv.5-8)
- ✦ to encourage and correct (v.9)

In the name of Jesus, who gives soothing ointment for our souls, dear fellow redeemed:

This is Jesus: He Empowers Your Witness. That's the theme of our service today, but that might leave you wondering like me why this text is our Second Lesson. It might be even more curious if I told you these verses from Paul's letter to Pastor Titus are new to the *Lectionary*. Pastors on the new WELS Hymnal Committee working to cover the whole message of the Bible in the three Bible readings over our three-year series thought these verses should be added in when they weren't there before. So it's fair to ask why verses about requirements for pastors should be preached to God's people in the pew. Until we answer that question, we'll have a hard time seeing how this Word of God can give us **Grace to Witness**.

- ✦ with character of servants (vv.5-8)

Part of the answer to the *Why?* of this text is because Pastor Titus was left behind by the Lord's Apostle Paul to serve on the island of Crete. Most everybody lived for themselves in luxury there. No respect for marriage – someone else's spouse, men with men, women with women – nobody cared. And who are you to say we're wrong anyway? Money was the object of living. If you could pile up the cash and have the political power to spend it your way and make even more, you were considered a success. It's not hard to see that if the Cretans in church were at all like the rest of the island, who would want to learn anything about Christ or hear God's Word from His preachers? They'd be bird-spattered mirrors of their own poet Epimenides: ***“Cretans are always liars, vicious beasts, and lazy gluttons.”*** (1:12 EHV)

Titus had his work cut out for him to find men who could serve as “elders in every city.” And we can easily see why this list is here. In fact, it sounds very much like Paul's list in 1 Timothy 3:2-12. These **elders**, also called **overseers** here, must have been much like our pastors, but without seminary, trained by Paul and Titus in local congregations. Notice, no job description. Just qualifications of good character: **blameless** – *above reproach if hauled into court, the husband of only one wife* – *literally a one-woman man, believing children who are not open to a charge of wild living or disobedience*. The **overseer/pastor** is **God's steward** – *managing the mysteries of God* which certainly includes administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution and His apostles' instructions. Because as God's **steward** he handles the holy Word of God, the overseer again, **must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not eager for dishonest gain. Instead, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, and disciplined.**

Clear character requirements for pastors and elders, but again, why preach this to God's people? Should anyone be undisciplined, inhospitable, literally anti-strangers, as we'd say, “anti-immigrants”? How easy it is to forget only decades ago our own immigrant grandparents were blackballed in the press for teaching and preaching in German. An FBI agent followed the DMLC President to mission festivals in the Twin Cities, expecting pro-German sedition. His report concludes the sermons were all about Christ alone. Should any Christian be a **drunkard**, or are we called to exercise **self-control** over our habits? Is it ever good to find that “people don't have filters on their mouth”? What happens to your **Witness** for Christ if you are known to be **arrogant** – *self?-pleasing, “My way or the highway”*? Have you mastered our Lord's command through His brother James? **“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”** (1:19) Or does a quick temper sometimes surprise you? Maybe not outside, but on the inside?

“We who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1), yet our Lord commands all His disciples, ***“You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world....People do not light a lamp and put it under a basket. No, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way let your light shine in people’s presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:13ff) Whose honor is most important, yours or God’s?

Are you letting your light shine? Or has COVID become an excuse to hide? Is our congregation eager to come back to Bible Class and worship in order to *grow*, then *go* to witness God’s Word everywhere? Or just gather for our own comfort with like-minded friends? Do you trust God with medicine, or leave God out of those discussions as if good science is incompatible? God’s **Grace to Witness** builds us up **with character of servants**. Yes, this text fits us all! We need **Grace...**

✦ to encourage and correct (v.9)

Day-by-Day and especially during our member visits for Catching Up After COVID, I see why our Lord’s Apostle tells Pastor Titus: The overseer-pastor ***“must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.”*** My own shortcomings despite my best efforts trouble me more than you can know when God’s people need so much more than I can give. I have to **encourage** and **correct** myself before I can begin to help our Lord’s disciples at New Life rise up in **Grace to Witness**. What we pastors find in God’s Word to comfort our own hearts is what our brothers and sisters need right here. Even greater is the need of those who are not yet hearing God’s Word to lift them up into the sunlight of God’s **Grace**. Until you and I have accepted the Lord’s correction for our own failings, how can we serve to help others without falling into the same trap? We need to **watch** ourselves. (Galatians 6:1)

God’s people need encouragement at this time, especially if you have been stepping up to give care to your brothers and sisters throughout this pandemic. In spite of your best efforts, you will hear silence, indifference, or even criticism, with little thanks. “Why didn’t anyone call me?” “But I did! So did the elders and the pastor, more than once.” “But why didn’t you tell me what I needed to hear at that time?” “How can I know what’s on your heart unless you tell me?” “Why didn’t you visit me?” “Did you tell the church you were in the hospital?” “They’re supposed to know that!” “Haven’t you heard of the HEPA law that makes it illegal for hospitals to tell our pastors? Did you forget the sympathy card we sent? And the time I talked with you in person?” Dear kind-hearted brothers and sisters, people forget, and you’re not keeping track of your good works because we’re saying, “Thanks!” to God for His **Grace**.

Paul warned Pastor Titus, ***“...by...sound teaching...to correct those who oppose him.”*** Dr. Martin Luther said if a man does not want to give correction, he should not be a pastor. And our Lord says to all disciples, ***“If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him.”*** (Luke 17:3 EHV) Be ready to speak God’s forgiveness, especially if you’ve been hurt. Our Lord warns: ***“If you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*** (Matthew 6:15 EHV)

A warning remains for any who complain they were not served in the way they want. Remember Jesus says He ***“did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*** (Matthew 20:28) Self-serving pride can only land on the left with the **goats** when the King will have to say, ***“Depart from me...”*** (Matthew 25:31-46) Where is the evidence of your faith? Who have you called to see how they’re doing? Or encouraged to come and hear God’s Word of soothing love? Others serve, while you accuse? **Grace to Witness** wants all of us by faith with the **sheep** on his right on Judgment Day to say, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat...thirsty...something to drink ...a stranger...you welcomed me...clothed me...sick and you took care of me...in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you... give you a drink...a stranger and welcome you...clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ The King will answer them, ‘Amen I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.’”*** (Matthew 25:34-40 EHV) **Grace to Witness** glory to God! Amen.

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