

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 16 October 2022

Lord God, help us to know your ways; teach us your paths. Lead us in your truth, and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation; for you, we wait all day long. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8

Faith and Prayer

The two readings have a common theme – faith in God. In 2 Timothy, faith enables believers to proclaim the good news. In Luke, Jesus says faith allows believers to pray to God, and God will grant justice according to their prayers. Faith in God also enables us to endure hardships and persevere in difficult situations. For example, the widow is never swayed by the attitude of the unjust judge. She had faith in God, who was the source of justice. The two readings tell us that faith is something we actively continue in what we have learned, believed, proclaimed the good news of Christ Jesus, and prayed in the love of God.

2 Timothy 3:14 reads, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.”¹ The word ‘continue – *meno* in Greek is ‘to remain, to continue, or to stand firm.’ According to R. Bultmann,² the usage of the word *meno* - to continue always involves a negation: not to give way. It does not, he says, respond to the question “where?” but rather to the question “how long?” In the earliest Greek, the word was used to express continuing at an objectively fixed place for an objectively determined time. Later it involved continuation in a personal bond as in John 15:4 – ‘Abide³ in me.’ As such, in 2 Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to continue with what he has learned from his childhood. It includes knowing whom he learned about the sacred writings and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In short, Paul tells Timothy to abide in Christ Jesus. In doing so, he will be equipped and proficient for every good work. For Paul, the sacred writings that Timothy has learned are alive and active enough to train and equip people. It enables him to proclaim the living word of God. From learning to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, we can see a process of transformation. When we see something really good, we’d like to share it with family and friends. That’s how we find good cafés, movies, books, and places for holidays. We

¹ 2 Timothy 3:14

² 1-3 John [Hermeneia] 26n.9

³ *menaite* – a command form of *meno*

depend on people's views and opinions. So learning to proclamation is not a uniquely Christian thing but a common thing in human society. The only difference may be it's not about daily food but food for life in the eternal. So in this letter to Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to do the same thing to share the good news with others whether the time is favourable or unfavourable. It is possible as long as Timothy continues— *meno* in what he has been doing. It also gives him an identity. In Luke 18:1-8, we see the same theme of continuity in Christ through different words.

The parable is about a judge who neither fears God nor has respect for people and a widow who wants justice to be granted to her against her opponent. What makes this parable remarkable is the widow's persistence. Despite the unjust judge's indifference, she doesn't stop coming to him or asking him to grant her justice against her opponent. As in 2 Timothy, she continues in what she believes: justice will be granted as much as God lives. This faith helps her not to lose her heart despite no visible sign of action from the judge.

Jesus told the disciples this parable as an example of praying to God while not losing their hearts. This parable is often coupled with another example of prayer. In Luke 11:5-13, Jesus tells the disciples about perseverance in prayer. For instance, it is about a friend you go to at midnight and tell her/him to lend you what you need – three loaves of bread. The friend may say not to bother them and doesn't want to give what you want. It is midnight, and everybody is sleeping. But if you persist, your friend will give you whatever you need in the end. At first glance, Jesus seems to reassure us that God is prepared to give us anything we persistently ask for something. But Jesus does not say this. He says what God, our Father, *wants* to give us, and we are to understand that what God gives us are the best possible gifts for God's children. As noted by Bultman, a sign of faith is a willingness to persist in prayer while not losing hope. We can only see when we continue to abide in the love of God. In the story time the story titled *Starkeeper* seems to say the same thing.

When a girl finds a fallen star, she decides to keep it hidden. But this star encourages kindness and needs to shine, so it comes out from the shadows. At first, the glow from the star starts to fade, and the girl worries. The girl thinks that maybe she's not a very good Starkeeper. Despite people's indifference and rejection of her offer to lend the star, she doesn't stop continuing to offer the star to shine on people's lives. Her unflinching faith in the star seems to brighten the star, and soon her faith leads to a chain of good works that light up the once-dreary town. When we read/listen to the story *Starkeeper*, it may raise one's eyebrows: how could anyone *keep* the

star? The beauty of children's picture books is that it opens up new possibilities. As the story unfolds, we learn that keeping a star doesn't mean keeping it in our pocket or the house, but making the star do its work properly – to shine and encourage people, to light up people's lives. As if the word 'to continue' or 'to persevere' isn't related to a location but continue to abide in Christ.

What does it tell us about the church today? What do we wish to continue? As the girl did it before, do we try to keep the living word of God in a fixed, confined place in this building or proclaim it through our living lives? When the word of God shines through our lives wherever we go, it is when we truly abide in Christ Jesus, continue learning and proclaiming the good news, and allow the word to live its life by shining over all people's lives. May God help us understand all these things as we wish to continue to be in the faith of Christ Jesus. Amen.