

SYNOD BIBLE STUDIES 1

Titus 2:1-14

Welcome to Synod - and to the Synod Bible Studies. I'm grateful to Bishop Mark for the opportunity to share with you over the next two mornings.

Mark, in his charge to us yesterday reminded us that in our pluralistic world, we both differ *from* each other and we differ *with* each other. He has encouraged us to reach across this divide, by discerning what matters to God, and bringing those insights to our interactions with those outside our own 'tribes'.

Quite often these same divides exist *within* the body of Christ, and such divides serve to not only cripple our own spiritual growth and understanding, but sully the impact of any overtures we make to reach out to a world singularly different from our own.

The impact of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, has revealed a divide of another kind of divide - a dissociation between spiritual values and carnal desires, but it has the same result. It has significantly damaged our credibility in the eyes of a secular world, and has the power to render our witness ineffective.

We need to do some serious work to redeem ourselves in the eyes of the world. To pursue holiness is the only way forward. Holiness personally and holiness communally.

I've chosen two excerpts from the letter to Titus for our study. The reason being that this letter, though written to a different situation and time from our own, contains many truths which traverse the centuries, and are just as relevant for us today. It is a letter that encourages us to pursue holiness.

Paul writes this letter to Titus, who appears to have been one of Paul's most trusted and valuable helpers. Paul calls him "my loyal child," so it is most likely that he himself led Titus to faith in Christ, perhaps at Iconium. Paul had preached in Crete, following his release from prison. When he moved on to other ministry, he despatched Titus to carry on his work there.

Crete, an isolated island smack in the middle of the Mediterranean, had a very questionable reputation. Paul said, in ch1:12, that it was one of Crete's own prophets who said, "Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons." Paul affirmed that this testimony was true. He knew that Titus has his work cut out for him in every way. In fact, it was tribute to

Titus that Paul entrusted him with this task. It wasn't going to be an easy one.

Paul wanted his churches to stand on their own feet as soon as possible so it was his custom to ordain elders as soon as a Church had been founded (Acts 14:23). This was particularly important in Crete, as the island was well populated and riddled with towns.

The purpose of Paul's letter was to instruct Titus in his responsibility as overseer of the church assemblies in Crete. The churches had no special buildings in Paul's day, and would usually meet in the homes of affluent members. Sometimes these homes could hold a standing congregation of between 100-200 people. Even if there were only a handful of churches, amongst the many towns in Crete, there would be a lot going on!

The first issue that Paul addressed in his letter was regarding the qualifications expected of prospective elders in the church (1:5-9) Leaders, in a nutshell, had to be above reproach. Pursuit of holiness was a prerequisite.

The second issue was a charge to oppose false teaching (1:10-16) The churches were being endangered and in fact ravaged, by teaching that originated from the 'Judaisers' from Jerusalem, insisting that Gentile believers submit to the bondage of the Mosaic regulations. This was combined with particularly ascetic practices, alongside the seeking of angelic visions and special divine knowledge. What made things worse, was that the teaching had entangled church leaders, and even co-workers. Paul instructed Titus to set them straight.

Incidentally - false teachers were not just restricted to the first century. Heresies have continued to plague the church from the first century to the present day. My husband Jay and I belonged to an Anglican church when we were first married, that was infiltrated by a false teacher. The results were catastrophic. I'll tell you more of that story tomorrow

So with that background in mind, we come to chapter 2 - our reading for this morning - where Paul moves on to the issue of Christian conduct in the Church.

Commentator William Barclay entitles this chapter Christian Character in Action.¹ It breaks down the community into various ages and stations, and sets out what their behaviour should look like as they live out their faith in an amoral world. Paul encourages Titus to rein in this unravelling

¹ William Barclay's daily Study Bible, Titus 2, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/titus-2.html>

church, and set it back on the path towards holiness. There is much for today's church in his teaching.

Let's look at verse 2 - THE OLDER MEN. Guys - You know you're in this category when you're warned to slow down by your doctor, and not by the police!

Older men are called to be temperate, serious, prudent, and sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. With maturity, there comes responsibility. They are to be examples for the younger members of the congregation. They are to set an example of moderation, not excess. (in complete contrast to society at large) They are to be mature and sound in their faith, and in their expression of it - there to help and guide the younger ones, who are perhaps more immature and flighty, and still finding their way in the things of God. They are to be worthy of respect. This is a serious calling for older men to be leaders and examples.

Verse 3 addresses the OLDER WOMEN. They are called to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers, or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.

In a cultural setting of slander and drunkenness, the older women are again called to be different. How difficult it is not to join in local gossip! You know why women live longer than men, don't you? They need time to finish all that they start to say! It figures - when a man answers the phone, he reaches for a pen, but we answer the phone, we reach for a chair?

The Greek word translated "reverent" carries the connotation of behaviour which is suitable to a sacred person, service or circumstance.² The same behaviour that would be expected of a priest in a temple. Once again - there is a sense that this is another serious calling - a sacred calling. Sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that we can't do anything, we're getting too old - we have no gifts - but Paul is saying just by virtue of their maturity and standing in the congregation, the older women have a very important role to fulfil in being an examples and teachers, particularly to the younger women in the church who would look up to them.

In v4-5, the YOUNGER WOMEN are encouraged to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands. Now before any younger women bristle too much at this advice, look at the end of v5

² Strong's Concordance <https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>

There is a reason clearly stated for this advice - it is so that the word of God may not be discredited. We need to remember that the cultural setting for women of that time was much different to our own. Women were possessions, with little or no rights. They didn't go to work - they weren't educated. The Christian faith gave them more freedom and emancipation than they could have dreamed of - and it was causing some scandal. Paul's advice was for them to "reign in", in the interests of the gospel. To remain more within the cultural mores of the day so as not to cause offence.

We can't take the commands directed to a 1st century church and lay them as a blueprint over our own culture. But we can heed the truth behind those commands and apply them to our own situation.

In verse 6, Paul instructs Titus to urge the YOUNG MEN to be self controlled.

The word used here for "urge" is much stronger in the Greek, than for the word "tell" in v2-3. In language, the tense is called the "imperative" - it carries the strength of a direct order rather than a request. Why? Think about the nature of a young man. It is one of great energy, of invincibility, of enormous confidence. That's why insurance premiums are higher for men under the age of 25. The difference between youth and middle age is that youth is when you think you'll live forever - middle age is when you wonder how you've lasted so long! Again, the emphasis is on self-control, on purity - on being different from the society at large.

Then Paul turns his attention to Titus himself - "Show yourself in all respects a model of good works" and again, a reason is given "so that any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us." The Greek word translated here as "model - or example in other translations" is the same word used to describe the impression made by a die or stamp in warm wax.³

Titus's example was to be so above board, so exemplary that the people were encouraged to copy it *exactly*.

Slaves, likewise, are encouraged to display excellent service, so that, says Paul, "in everything they may be an ornament to the doctrine of God our Saviour."

Paul concludes this section with an enthusiastic exhortation to take his instructions on board - worthy of the fieriest of evangelical preachers!

³ Strong's Concordance <https://www.biblestudytools.com/concordances/strongs-exhaustive-concordance/>

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

This purity is the light Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:16, when he said, “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

One of the great Christian writers of the 17th century - Blaise Pascale - nailed it when he said, “The serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world, next to the might of the Spirit of God.”

Let's rise to this call, shall we? Let us come before God with renewed commitment to live the holy lives he has called us to live, to truly be the Church he has called us to be. A Church that will reach across the divide, making a difference to our world; a Church that will usher in the Kingdom of God.