

This Sunday's texts:

Deuteronomy 6:6-8

Colossians 3:15-17

John 1:35-42a

In the Name of Jesus

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A Gospel reading for today from the Gospel of John, chapter one, verses 35 through 42a:

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they follow Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means teacher) "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed was followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus.

Here ends the reading of the Gospel.

Good morning! It's strange to be here for the last time, sharing with you today. I have to admit that this is been the most difficult sermon I've ever had to write because there's so much that I could share and hope to communicate. But honestly, we don't have time for me to say it all. So it's been a lot of time thinking and praying about this message and as I was, I was also reflecting and reminiscing on my time here at Saint Tim's, the last eleven years on full-time staff, and an entire lifetime as a member. Earlier this week, I was talking with some folks at my going away party and was thinking. I was 23 years old when I began full-time work here and the

kids who are in sixth and seventh grade then are about 22, 23 years old now. They were the same age now as I was when I started my ministry here.

I will be forever grateful to Saint Tim's for the opportunity to grow up, to grow in faith, to discern and grow into my calling in this community of faith. From my baptism in February of 1987 to today, Saint Timothy's has been the community within which my faith has been incubated and cultivated and nurtured and my calling has been discerned. So after everything, to have this opportunity to share with you from God's word one last time, I found myself with a little bit of writer's block. I've spent so much time praying about what I would share today, but also praying for Saint Timothy's and its ministry moving forward, as I move on. The fruit of that prayer is what I would like to share with you all today.

I wanted to share some scripture passages that have been meaningful to me in my ministry and that I continue to pray over Saint Tim's and its ministry as we go our separate ways. I'll primarily focus on the text from Colossians 3:15-17. It says this:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Today, I'm just going to walk us through this passage. As I do so, I believe and I hope that God would reveal to you as individuals and as a church, his desire, his heart, his hopes, and his will.

It starts like this. Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." Just sit with that passage for a second. I don't know about you, but I feel a sense of almost physical relief and refreshing wash over me as I think of the idea of the peace of Christ. Because peace would not be the first word that I would use to describe my everyday life experience and perhaps it isn't yours either. You know, the world around us is chaotic and divisive right now. We are constantly bombarded with messages on this 24-hour news experience cycle. It seems like the ground is almost shifting within our feet as we try to find a firm place to stand. And that's just the world outside of us. Then it's how it interacts with our own internal experience. All of this comes together to create an experience of life as individuals and together that I think peace would not be how we would use to describe it.

But Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. As the body of Christ, we are where the peace of God rules. Saint Timothy's, my prayer for you is that this would be a place where you live in to the peace of God, the peace that transcends all understanding that can only come from him. I don't mean a superficial kind of peace, that kind of Pax Romana-kind of peace, where we all agree to sheathe our weapons for now, but the underlying discomfort is still there, that anxiety and that sense of unease, that this peace is just a veneer.

That's not the kind of peace that is the peace of Christ, but it is the kind of peace that so many of us live in. Rather, the peace of Christ that rules in our hearts is the peace that only comes as the fruit of our having been freely reconciled to God by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the peace that can truly say, "I can forgive because I have been forgiven. I

can love because I have been loved. We can be one because the one who unites us is God himself.” My prayer for you is that you would let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

As we move on, “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts.” Now here is the opportunity for grammar nerds among us to rejoice. If that is not you, I ask you to hang in with us because I promise there's a payoff, and this opportunity to sort of exploring pronouns and prepositions has real-life practical theological implications for us. The word “you” that is used in this passage: “let the word of Christ dwell in *you*.” In Greek, that word is plural. That has major implications for how we understand this passage. It's not just you, the individual. As Western Christians, it's so easy for us to read the word “you” and read it as “me” rather than as “us.” But here, this is the plural “you.” This is the *us* that God is speaking to. And the preposition that gets translated as “in” might be more appropriately translated in this context as “among.” Greek prepositions often have this incredible range of potential meanings and we discern which specific one is best translated into English by the context within which we find it.

So I'm going to propose today the JHU translation. The Joe Hill Unofficial translation of this passage might read more appropriately “Let the word of Christ dwell among ya'll.”

The gospel is not something that we cherish as individuals, but then partition off as part of our religious life or as part of our life that we do on Sunday mornings and Tuesday nights. Rather, it's a holistic experience and a reality that is shared between God's people in all circumstances. That's what it looks like for the word of Christ to dwell richly among us. It is a shared reality, not one that we sequester away within our personal lives and it doesn't show

anywhere else. It is this rich reality shared between us that happens when we teach and encourage, when we admonish one another in the wisdom that comes from Christ. That wisdom is found in God's word when we prayerfully turn our hearts and minds towards it. It happens when we share that experience together.

There was a years-long study done by the Barna group, a group that does research and compiles data on the spiritual and religious trends of the church and of America and our broader culture together. In this study, they found that 61% of Christians, 55% of non-practicing Christian, and 55% of non-Christians are interested in having conversations about faith and spiritual matters with their friends. How many of you would be interested in having spiritual and faith-filled conversations with those you're close with? But how often do we do it? Sometimes it can feel weird. It can feel personal or awkward to be the one who brings it up. But the reality is that there are so many of us and so many people out there who are hungry for real and authentic questions about faith and spirituality. In fact, the same study said that one-third of all US adults say that they have had a major change in their life come about as the result of a conversation that they had with somebody about faith. We have so much to gain, so much to offer by being proactive about our faith conversations. So don't be afraid.

You know, my life was transformed because of all of the people here at Saint Tim's who were willing to talk to me about faith through every age and every stage of life. I remember Marge and Karen Stake, the first Sunday school teachers I can remember having here at Saint Tim's. I remember being in this very sanctuary during Sunday School time, singing songs right up in the front pews here with Mrs. Penticura, when the carpet was still orange and shag. Yeah, we've come a long way. I also survived Sunday School as a 4th grader with Tim Stahlke and I'm

blessed to still call him a brother in Christ today, as he and I meet together regularly for breakfast at the Cup and Saucer to talk about life, faith, music, family, and whatever else it is that might come up. I also remember my high school small group leader, Don Thompson. He was the first person I can remember who encouraged me specifically to consider going into ministry. He was the first one. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for his words to me at that pivotal time in my life when I was trying to discern God's will. He was also the first person that I remember talking seriously with me about death. When I was a freshman in college, at that same time that he was encouraging me to consider ministry, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and invited me to be a part of his life, as he went through that process of battling cancer and ultimately going home to be with the Lord. In that, he modeled true faith and confidence in Christ. I look forward to seeing him again one day. I wouldn't be where I am today without him.

Now, in preparation for this message, I actually wrote out a list and I won't read it to you because it got awfully long. As I was writing down names and got upwards of 30, and 40, and 50+ people that I could identify specific ways in which they had invested in my own life and in my faith in meaningful ways here at Saint Tim's, it became abundantly clear to me. If it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a church to raise a child in faith. It takes a church where the word of Christ dwells richly.

I think that's why our Deuteronomy text for today says that these Commandments should be on our hearts. They should be the things we talk about in our homes, when we're sitting at our tables, when we're coming along our way, when we lay down, and when we stand up. It says that we should bind them as symbols on our hands and on our foreheads. They should be a natural part of who we are and an ever-present reality in our relationships.

Thank you Saint Timothy's for being this church for me, a church where the word of Christ dwells richly. I challenge you to continue to be that church, proactively for every infant and toddler, child and teen, young adult, grown adult, married couple, family, widow, and widower because there is no age and stage where we do not need the word of Christ to dwell richly among us. So teach and encourage one another because you never know the kind of impact that those relationships and those conversations might have on people.

In our Gospel text for today, I'm not entirely sure that Andrew had any idea what was going to happen when he brought his brother Peter to see Jesus. Nonetheless, he brought Peter to see Jesus. It's been my prayer throughout my ministry that I could be like Andrew that I could be the one who tells people "Come and see. We have found the Messiah!" and point them to Jesus. It is my prayer that that kind of ministry would be on the hearts of each and every person hearing this message today, to be the one who brings others to see Jesus.

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Now, this is a big all-encompassing kind of statement here. Whatever you do. He doesn't just say with the big things, or the challenging things, or the things that it feels like it is outside of our own power to do. He says, in *all* things, do it in the name of Jesus. When you're at home, in your schools, your workplaces, with your families, your friends, your sports teams, and more. Wherever it is that you find yourself and whatever it is that you find yourself doing, be there and do it in the name of Jesus and for his glory. Think about and pray about what it is that God is calling you to do in your life and who it is that he's calling you to be, in word and deed, how you speak and how you act.

I'm going to share with you one of my least favorite quotes from the popular Christian culture. It's often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi and it goes like this, "Preach the gospel at all times, when necessary use words." That's one of my least favorite quotes. I'll tell you why. It's not because it's not true. That is a true statement. But it makes me uneasy because I would hate for there to be people out there who consider it license to withhold talking about Jesus. To do their good deeds and leave the name of Jesus Christ unspoken.

My dad once told me about an encounter he had with a young man at a coffee shop. At Saint Tim's in the past and we still have the little hanger out in the narthex, we used to give away these little cross necklaces. They're made up of 3 nails. It was a program that we called the "Cross Away" program. The idea is that you would wear this cross necklace. Whenever somebody would mention something about it, and it often happened because it's an interesting and rather striking necklace, whenever somebody would call it out or mention something, you could take that as an opportunity to tell them about Jesus and then you give that cross necklace away. There are plenty more to get when you came back to church next Sunday. So my dad would wear these necklaces all the time and this guy at the coffee shop pointed it out, "Say hey, that's a pretty cool necklace." My dad said, "Yeah it represents the cross of Jesus. Do you know about Jesus?" And you know what this young man said? He said, "No." This young man got into adulthood, at a coffee shop not even 2 miles away from Saint Timothy's Lutheran Church and countless other churches in this area, had grown up into adulthood and did not know about Jesus. He hadn't heard. Nobody had told him. Saint Timothy's, do not take for granted that the people around us have heard.

So in word and deed, live in the name of Christ. I don't want my apprehension about this Saint Francis quote to make you think that you can go about being a jerk to people, as long as you talk about Jesus. That is not the point. The point is that the witness of the church is powerful, when both our words *and* our deeds glorify God in heaven. In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus puts it this way. He says then the people will “see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.”¹

Now as I come in for a close today, I want to point something out about this text. Each of the three verses that we read, from Colossians, ends with a comment about thankfulness. There's a correlation in scripture between gratitude and faith. It shows up all the time. Those who forget to give thanks forget how much they have to give thanks for and they forget to whom the thanks is due. So give thanks to God.

I believe that this last year has taught us all about how easy it is to take things for granted. We take the little things for granted and then when they're gone, we realize that they were never really little things. Right? I pray that we would never take our church, that we would never take one another for granted, that we would give thanks for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for our community of faith here at Saint Tim's.

Today, we read three verses that all end in thankfulness, that all end in gratitude. So that is where I would like to end as well. I'm beyond thankful for the years I had on staff here at Saint Tim's and for the many years before that that I had is a part of this community of faith growing up. For every single one of you who prayed for me, who taught a Sunday school class or lead a small group, for those of you who join me on missions trips and partnered with me in

¹ Matthew 5:16b (NIV)

...serving the community here, but also those who served *me* in different ways and as I mentioned, there's more of you count, you helped steward the faith for me as I grew up here at Saint Tim's. It is because of what you did and what God has done through you that I am who I am today. I'm going on to what He has next in store for me. I speak for Elizabeth as well in saying that and in saying thank you. Now as my family moves on, as we move on to what God has in store for us next, I thank God that we got to grow up in a church that showed up for us, in the name of Jesus, a church in which the word of Christ has dwelt richly.

I pray that you would continue to show up for one another in the name of Jesus as well. The next time you're in your grow group, the next time you're here in the sanctuary, I encourage you to look around because each and every one of those people needs you to show up for them in the name of Jesus. The next time you're here in this sanctuary I want you to look at those doors at the back of the sanctuary and know that there is a world out there that desperately needs the people of God to show up for them, in the name of Jesus, too. Saint Tim's, I love you and I'm so grateful for the opportunity that I've had to grow up here, to serve here, to grow in faith, to have my calling nurtured, and to be empowered and sent. I'm so grateful for that and I thank you. I pray that, as you move on into the future of what God has in store for you, that you would continue to nurture the faiths of one another, of the kids in this church, of the teens - even though they're scary - I understand. Each and every one of you has a calling from God, a vocation that you would do whatever it is you do in word or deed, in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.