

## **2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18**

*I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

*At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

So, how are you all doing? Yep, that is the response that we are programmed to give in our greeting ritual.

In most cases that question, “How are you?”, is often one of those throw away questions. Typically, the answer is a polite “fine, thank you” and then we quickly moved past the formalities as we get on to whatever it is that we are getting on to. You know what I mean, right? We lay out the question and then most of us let the answer flow past us so the second part, the completion, of a formal greeting ritual can be completed, so that we can say what we really want to say.

You know, Paul probably had something just like that, too. It probably started with “shalom”. And the response was probably the same. And then they, back in their time, got on with their conversation just like we do. It is amazing how things remain the same. But in about 56 AD the Apostle Paul, in written form, elaborated. What I mean is that he actually told the church in Corinth how it was really going for him in his life.

In 2 Corinthians 11 starting at verse 24 he gave an answer to the question, “How’s it going?”. He told actually them how it has been going over the past ten or so years. And here is what he said:

I have received, on five occasions, 40 lashes minus one. The reason this is significant is that it was believed that the fulfillment of a full 40 lashes was a death sentence. He told then that

he had been beaten with rods 3 times, stoned once, shipwrecked 3 times during which he was left adrift in the sea for days at a time.

He told them that during his travels as a missionary for Christ (he had only completed two of his four by this time) that he had been in constant danger. He had been in danger from river crossings and robbers on the road. He was in danger from his own people, the Jewish people; and from the Gentiles, as well. He was in danger whether he was in the city, or in the wilderness, or on the sea. He was even in danger from false brothers who said that they were there to help. He told the church in Corinth about toils and hardships, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and exposure to the elements.

He painted for them a picture of his life as an Apostle. And on top of all that, he told them about how he was in a constant state of worry...a constant state of worry about the churches and the struggles they might also be up against.

And the truth was, when he wrote the second letter to the church in Corinth he was only half way through. He still had another eleven years before he would finally be executed in Rome under Nero. More beatings to come, more imprisonments, more hunger, and an increasingly aching body from all the wear.

So, when I get to Second Timothy, when I get to the verses that we heard this morning which were written shortly before his execution, I am amazed and so uplifted. Just think about it for a minute. Twenty plus years of sacrifice and struggle and his closing words to Timothy, the last words that, as far as we know, were ever sent to his partner in mission as he saw his execution on the horizon, were, "To Christ be the Glory forever and ever, Amen."

Isn't that amazing? I love that! He had fought the good fight. He had finished the race. He had kept the faith. Alleluia! Praise the Lord! Joy is in his old tired heart. Peace fills his battered body. Not an ounce of regret.

He had been fully poured out as a libation. What that means is that his whole life has been poured out as an offering to God. His life had been offered up, and poured out, yet, as he faces God at the end, he is so obviously full, not empty. Full of joy and peace, having lived a life fulfilled.

You know, there are words in a passage from both Matthew and Luke that I want to be the first words I hear when I arrive in heaven. They are: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Well done, good and faithful servant.

We all seem to have such different visions of heaven. When you arrive, wouldn't you rather hear those words as a faithful disciple, instead of "welcome, you have a tee time at 9 and there is a sale at Macy's". Wouldn't you rather hear God tell you that you have fought the good fight, whatever the cost, in the midst of a barrage of skepticism and antagonism and intellectualism and the-world-knows-better-ism. That you finished the race even when you felt

down, or scared, or unsure, or came upon tough times, no matter how hard it became. And you kept the faith, even as the world offered up so many alternatives. Welcome good and faithful servant, not to something that you had always imagined, but to something that was beyond your imagination.

That is what I want to hear. That is what I want to experience. When it comes to leaving this physical life, I want to be like Paul. I want to know that I became who God made me to be and I did what I could in furthering the mission of God to bring wholeness to all human beings. I hope that is the wish of all of us.

Here's the thing with Paul. Although Paul had a lot to teach us with his words, I think it might have been his life itself that taught us the greatest lesson. He would have been the first to recognize his apparent sacrifice, and to the eyes of most people in his world, and I'm sure many in ours, he gave up a great deal. He suffered so much. But here is the lesson. Here is what is amazing. When it came time to look back, when it came back to assess his life, Paul praised God for the privilege and the opportunity he was given to be part of the disclosing of Christ to the world.

And that is what we need to hear this morning. We are asked by God for no more than what was asked of Paul...and we are asked no less. We are asked to embrace a life as faithful followers of Christ in the midst of all our blessings... and within all our trials. We are called to be the community of the faithful and for us that community has been named after our Savior, Himself. Through Redeemer, we are called to share Christ within the world. And this morning, Stewardship Sunday, we commit to feed that mission through the financial resources that God has place into our lives. We are not asked to commit to a hobby and purchase a product. We are asked to commit to a life and to a mission. We are not asked to provide for God mission meagerly because His mission to the world is one of abundance. We are not asked to share God's love sparingly, because He loves us and all people fully and showed that love sacrificially.

We, just like Paul, are called to a life, to be a people, to be disciples, who will be able to look back upon our lives with great joy and peace, knowing that we too have finished the race, kept the faith, and left to those who come after us the means and the place through which they can embrace the same joy that we have found. To pour out our lives as libations, as an offering to God, being fully the disciples we are called to be.

When we all come forward this morning to encounter God at the altar rail, if you are ready, I ask that you bring your offering to God for the coming year and place it in the basket. Then at the end of our communion with God we will seek his blessing for both our offerings and for our life together for the coming year.

Come to the Lord with Thanksgiving, for we truly have much to be thankful for.

Amen