

Series: Open Door

Sunday, May 29

Titus Sermon: #2: Not Walking Alone

Scripture: Titus 1:10-16

Text: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life....” -Titus 1:1-2a

Theme: Exploring how we live on the other side of the open door, the link between gospel belief and gospel behavior. He helps us reorient the gospel to the center of our lives. The Book of Titus helps lay out how to live according to God’s promises.

Blurb: Who has God placed in your life to help shape you, form you, encourage you? Who are your role models, spiritual guides, advisors? This Sunday we go back to the book of Titus to see how we link gospel belief and gospel behavior. God knows we grow best when we have spiritual mentors to help us grow spiritually. Come and learn about the mentors God has provided for you, and how you can be one, too!

PP#1: Not Walking Alone

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life....” -Titus 1:1-2a

Not Walking Alone. Titus 1:1 “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life....”

PP#2: *Picture of Rebekah as newborn*

I remember so vividly the moment when the doctor first put newborn Rebekah in my arms. I got to hold her before Reese did, because Reese was still in surgery. I sat with her in the quiet of the night, rocking back and forth, overwhelmed with wonder and awe, the miracle of new life, *my* daughter! One thought kept racing through my mind, over and over again: “What am I supposed to do with her?”

It wasn’t a cute little baby that I was holding. It was a huge responsibility that I had been tasked with to raise, in safety, in medical health, in mental stability, education, social development, character formation, spiritual growth, peer groups, college, career path, spouse and family, and it was all my responsibility! I kinda freaked out. And I decided to send her back. Then Reese woke up.

PP#3: *Picture of Rebekah holding Nathan*

A blink passed by, and then another doctor handed me another crying baby, this time a boy. “Take him home!,” they all said. “Can’t I leave him here?,” I asked! Nope. It was my responsibility to raise him and grow him up. So, Reese and I locked arms, dug our heels in, and braced for the ordeal.

We’re still locked, heels dug in, braced.

And this is one of the main reasons I come to church. You all think it’s my job and that I have to. The secret reason is that I come to bring my kids here, so you all will help me raise them!

Now, actually, that's not really a joke. I do bring my kids here, because I need your help in raising them. I can't raise them well enough on my own. I need you. They need you!

PP#4: *The church or family of God as a tree, growing, or some image for us all growing together.*

Paul, in the New Testament, describes the Church as the Household of God. Together, we are all spiritual family. And just like my nuclear family is a greenhouse in which we are all growing, so is my church family a greenhouse in which we are all growing. As church, you all help shape, form, educate, invest in, guide, and encourage my kids...and you do that for me, too!

We do that for and with each other. Being church together means that we help one another grow. Together we can grow spiritually in ways that we cannot on our own.

Walking through the doors God has opened in front of us is always an invitation to grow spiritually, with God, and with the family of God. Life on the other side of the door is a life of spiritual growth! And we're not walking alone. That's why we're looking at Titus for a few weeks. The book of Titus is about growing spiritually as God's family together.

PP#5: *Map of Corinth, Ephesus, and Crete.*

Paul was Jew, whom Jesus called to be a missionary among the Gentile Romans. On his first missionary trip through Turkey, he met a man named Titus. Not only did Titus give his life to Jesus, he decided to join Paul in his missionary work. Together they go to Ephesus, Corinth, and a number of other places, including the Island of Crete. Well, Paul heads back to Ephesus, and leaves Titus to continue working among the new Christians in the various towns of Crete.

About 10 years later, Paul is in prison in Rome, and he writes Titus a letter back on Crete. Paul's letter is what is in our Bibles as the book of Titus.

PP#6: Titus 1

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 3 and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Paul, throughout the letter to Titus, talks about how the Christians on Crete are to grow spiritually. And he instructs Titus to organize the churches there, the various households of God, so that they can all flourish and grow spiritually together. Don't miss this right away in the very first verse. "From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to *further the faith* of God's elect [or God's household] and *their knowledge of truth that leads to godliness...*" Paul says that his role among them, and his goal for them, is to further their faith, and to increase their knowledge of truth in a way that grows them to live a more godly way. And he calls Titus his son in the faith, and then gives him instructions for how he is to help the believers on Crete to keep growing.

PP#7: Not Walking Alone

1. Spiritual growth links gospel knowledge with gospel behavior

Truth that leads to godliness. Here Paul tips his hand about a key way that believers grow spiritually. Believers grow by continually linking gospel knowledge with gospel behavior. We learn more and more about Jesus, and we integrate that into our lives, and as we live more and more like Jesus, we discover more and more about the Jesus we follow. Growing spiritually is not just knowing your Bible better. It's not just being kind to your neighbors and being a good person. It's integrating gospel knowledge with gospel behavior. As John Wesley calls it, holiness of heart and life.

PP#8: Titus 1 (CEV)

5 I left you in Crete to do what had been left undone and to appoint leaders for the churches in each town. As I told you, 6 they must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. Their children must be followers of the Lord and not have a reputation for being wild and disobedient.

How is this done? How are believers grown to integrate these two? What is the context, the environment, the green house, in which this happens? Paul tackles this first in his letter to Titus. I left you on Crete on purpose. There was work that I did not get done, and so I left it to you. First and foremost, appoint leaders among the churches. Get them organized! Create households in which believers help one another grow. As new Christians are converted/spiritually born into God's family, they need to be brought to a church that can help them grow.

Verse 5. "I left you in Crete to do what had been left undone and to appoint leaders for the churches in each town."

Now, before we wade in any further, I want to explain something. Very often, the next verses in Titus, and the similar list in 1 Timothy 3, are read and used like they lay out specific requirements for screening Christian leaders. They're read like a checklist. "An elder must be a husband of only one wife." OK, that means that anyone who has ever been remarried, cannot be a leader.

Or how about what Paul says first, "An elder must be blameless"?

Well, that's why I'm using the Contemporary English Version here this morning. It takes the specific language and tries to translate it in a way that captures the meaning of Paul's words, not as a checklist. If you interpret it literally, and legalistically, than no one could ever be a leader, because no one is ever blameless! We need to hear this as Paul's instruction to someone who is working with a real church, full of people just like you and me.

And these descriptions would have made helpful and practical sense to the believers in Crete at that time. For example, a leader "must be a husband of but one wife." At that time and location, the leaders were men. That fit their culture and setting. Furthermore, Paul and Titus would fail their own rule if taken literally, for neither one was actually a husband! See how this breaks down when applying it like a checklist?

And remember Paul's stated intention: helping the believers on Crete to grow spiritually, to further their faith, to grow in godliness. So, this instruction on appointing leaders is not just about providing the gift of effective administrators, it's also about providing the gift of *spiritual mentors*.

PP#9: Not Walking Alone

1. Spiritual growth links gospel knowledge with gospel behavior
2. Church leaders serve as our spiritual mentors

Church leaders are not just effective, they are also guides. People look to them as for how to grow spiritually; people turn to them for guidance and wisdom; people entrust them with their

own personal issues and concerns. This helps us understand a bit better why Paul lays out the requirements he does: they've got to have had some success in doing it right!

PP#10: Titus 1 (CEV)

5 I left you in Crete to do what had been left undone and to appoint leaders for the churches in each town. As I told you, 6 they must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. Their children must be followers of the Lord and not have a reputation for being wild and disobedient.

Okay, so, back to what it means, using the CEV version rather than some of the more literal versions, like the King James, RSV and the NIV.

Verse 6: "As I told you, they must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. Their children must be followers of the Lord and not have a reputation for being wild and disobedient."

Paul here is concerned about their reputation. They must be people that other people see as good examples. Not sinless. But perhaps it might be argued from Paul's writings on sin, that Paul did mean that they were not to knowingly break known laws of God, or blatantly, or defiantly sin. They must take their marriage seriously, for their marriage is made by God. Faithful: no multiple wives at the same time, and no mistresses. They are going to be counseling others about their marriages. If they aren't being faithful, how can they help others to be faithful? Same with their children. They've got to demonstrate some effective parenting. Again, provided they have kids. After all, neither Paul nor Titus had children that we are aware of. So again, hear this as, if you have kids, show some evidence of being a Christian in your parenting. In my case, bring them to Forest Hills!

And not that their kids must be perfect, or never stumble. They can't force their kids to be Christians. But they have to demonstrate that they are trying to raise their children in following Jesus. They have to demonstrate some experience in helping their own children navigate around wild and disobedient living. They are mentors, guides, and role models.

PP#11: Not Walking Alone

1. Spiritual growth links gospel knowledge with gospel behavior
2. Church leaders serve as our spiritual mentors
3. Church leaders are examples of spiritual maturity

Did you catch that? Paul is also lifting up elders *as examples for what spiritual maturity looks like*. They represent, they show, in their own lives, what God wants Christians to be like. They are what others are to strive to be like. They must be effective in running things. They must be helpful in guiding others with their issues. And they must live as examples for what being a mature Christian looks like.

That means that the list of qualifications Paul lists out are not just for elders. They are for all Christians! The leaders may have some demonstrated progress towards them, but these are qualifications towards which all of us are striving.

So, as Titus is hearing this, it describes the people he is to choose as leaders. But as we hear this, we are to hear it describing how we want to be. This is not a tool to help evaluate others. It's useful as a tool to help us evaluate *ourselves*!

Are you listening, church? Good reputation, faithful in marriage, discipling as parents.

Well, after looking at their personal life...how they relate to their personal families, Paul then looks at how they relate to their church families. He lists five characteristics of what mature Christians—who also make good leaders—do NOT do.

PP#12: Titus 1 (CEV)

7 Church officials are in charge of God's work, and so they must also have a good reputation. They must not be bossy, quick-tempered, heavy drinkers, bullies, or dishonest in business. 8 Instead, they must be friendly to strangers and enjoy doing good things. They must also be sensible, fair, pure, and self-controlled. 9 They must stick to the true message they were taught, so that their good teaching can help others and correct everyone who opposes it.

Verse 7, "Church officials are in charge of God's work, and so they must also have a good reputation. They must not be bossy, quick-tempered, heavy drinkers, bullies, or dishonest in business." So, church, don't just evaluate me, and our church's senior leadership, by these standards. Use these also to evaluate yourself. How do you do on these characteristics of spiritual maturity? Are you growing? Are you making progress? Can we at church help you with that?

After listing things they are *not* to do, then Paul lists six things they *are* to do. Verse 8, "Instead, they must be friendly to strangers and enjoy doing good things. They must also be sensible, fair, pure, and self-controlled."

Mature Christians have time and attention for strangers. They give of themselves for others. They have time to serve, they show up doing good things. Would other people describe you as sensible, fair, pure, and self-controlled? No, not that they understand how hard it is for you to remain composed when you're angry, or how they overlook your behavior when you're stressed out. That's not what it says. Paul is saying that when you're angry, are you sensible, fair and pure. When you're stressed out, then you still maintain self-control. Would those closest to you describe you this way? Are you growing? Are you making progress? Can we at church help you with that? Perhaps you want to join a small group!

Verse 9, "They must stick to the true message they were taught, so that their good teaching can help others and correct everyone who opposes it."

Here's the mentoring, the influence on others, that what they say and teach is truly helpful to others.

PP#13: Not Walking Alone

1. Spiritual growth links gospel knowledge with gospel behavior
2. Church leaders serve as our spiritual mentors
3. Church leaders are examples of spiritual maturity
4. Leadership/maturity also includes correction

And these leaders, these mature Christians, are not to be only nicey-nicey. They don't only tell people what they want to hear. They don't accept anything and everything. All things are not okay. We are on a path to maturity. We are growing, away from ungodliness, and towards godliness. That means blazing the good path, calling people by word and example to God's good way.

Paul says they must stick to the message of salvation in Jesus, that faith alone is required, but it is evidenced in godly living and growing in maturity. Some, Paul goes on to say, teach things differently. Some among you on Crete, for a specific example, are trying to teach that in order to follow Jesus, believers must also follow all the Jewish rituals and customs.

For the rest of chapter 1, Paul tells Titus to correct them. Not drive them out, but correct them in love and truth. Paul even says that this may require Titus to be rather hard on them, getting them to stop this wrong teaching and leading others astray. They are making power plays, trying to gain influence by controlling the money of the church. This shows their wrong motivation! Be hard on them, *so that* they also can grow spiritually!

Identify leaders for everyone to see, so people will know who to trust and listen to, and who NOT to listen to!

PP#14: Titus 1 (CEV)

16 Such people claim to know God, but their actions prove that they really don't....

And finally, Paul ends the chapter again linking belief and actions. The false teachers are shown to be false because their actions don't show it. Maturity is when the claims people make about God are evidenced in their actions. Gospel knowledge linked with gospel behavior.

PP#15: *An image suggesting spiritual growth, encouraging us to want to grow spiritually.*

Titus has some administration to do. He has to appoint good leaders, and suppress false teachers. But most importantly, Titus is to organize the churches so that believers are encouraged to grow spiritually. Growing spiritually links gospel knowledge with gospel behavior. This was true for Titus on Crete. This is true for our leaders, here at church. But this is also true for all of us, as we strive to grow to maturity! There is a good path, with good behaviors linked with good beliefs.

How do we do this? Well, we don't walk alone. We need to walk with the church. This church is a community that calls each of us to grow in that good path. Our leaders demonstrate this. Our leaders guide us in this. Our leaders model this. Our leaders are a gift we thank God for. So, let's end by praying for the leaders God has placed among us here at this church.

Pray with me, right now...

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MAY 29, 2016

Sermon: “Not Walking Alone”

Scripture: Titus 1:5-16

Opening prayer

Introductions: Share about someone who has mentored you in your faith journey.

Background: Skim Titus 1:1-4. Share what you remember about this book, it’s author, and situation.

Read: Titus 1:5-16

1. Verse 5. What was the task Paul left Titus on Crete to do?
2. Paul’s language in verse 5 can be translated as “ordain elders.” This is one of the scriptural passages that supports the United Methodist’s ordination of clergy as “elders.” What may ordination mean, do you think, given this context?
3. Verse 6. Read this verse in a literal translation (such as King James or NIV) and read it in a more contemporary translation (such as CEV, or even a paraphrase like *The Message*). As you compare them, what do you think the meaning of this verse is?
4. Describe a context where this verse has been used literally and very legalistically. How might the claim that the leader must be blameless suggest that Paul may have not intended this verse to be taken quite so literally?
5. Verse 7. Paul uses a different word in verse 7: “overseer.” Some Bibles translate that as bishop. I think that in this context, Paul may simply be continuing to talk about the leaders he referenced in verse six. What do you think?
6. Name the five characteristics that the leader must NOT be. How would you describe them?
7. Verse 8. Paul then names six characteristics the leader must be. List them. Again, how would you describe them? For example, what might hospitality mean in that context when and where Christians were persecuted?
8. Verse 9. Why is it so important, according to Paul, that leaders know the truth of their belief?
9. If time: Read verses 9-16. Discuss what is going on here, and what it says for readers today.
10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?