

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
September 11, 2016**

**1 Timothy 1:12-17**

**Just One Reason**

**Hymns: 392 – 749 – 545 – 432**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

***I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.***

***<sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

1 Timothy 1:12-17

A middle-aged man is set to begin a new career. And this new job sure comes with great responsibility. So prestigious is his new position, that he has actually been called by God himself. So important is his work that the resurrected Jesus actually appeared to this man to commission him to his new role. This man named Saul was to be God's messenger to the Gentiles! He was to be God's light to the world, serving as a missionary in places where the good news of salvation had never before been heard!

But how could he possibly do it? Because he didn't seem to fit the position at all. After all, he was a zealous Jewish Pharisee who held to the belief that God's love and favor belonged only to the chosen descendants of Abraham. Hardly the best candidate to go to non-Jewish people. So fanatical was this view that this man had made it his career, thus far, to destroy anyone or anything that had to do with following Christ. He was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a violent man. He was, in fact, Christianity's greatest enemy.

There were so many reasons why this man we know as Paul could not and should not have been an apostle of Jesus Christ; so many reasons why he shouldn't have been sent into the world to spread the good news of Christianity.

And how easy it would've been for Paul to look at those reasons and to be filled with self-doubt and to be crippled by fears and uncertainties. How easy it would've been for the other apostles – his new coworkers – to doubt his sincerity and to question his worthiness. How easy it would've been for his listeners to laugh at the irony of persecutor turned preacher or to chafe at the hypocrisy of this man who had martyr's blood on his hands. There are so many reasons why we shouldn't know Paul as the "greatest of the apostles" of the early Christian church.

Yet there is really just one reason that we do. What one reason could supersede all of those reasons that speak against Paul's ability to be an apostle? It is the Grace of God!

Paul knew that full well. And that is why as he began writing this letter to Timothy about what it meant to be an ambassador for Christ, he didn't point to all of his characteristics and abilities which had enabled him to become this great apostle for Jesus. He did, for a moment, point to himself, but only to remind Timothy that he was the worst. But more fervently, he pointed to the Grace of God as the one reason why he was able to work as an apostle and ambassador. Listen to all of the ways he points to God's working in his life. **Read from text.**

Paul knew the grace of God, and it was grace which allowed a man, who was the very worst on his own, to do what he did for the sake of Christ

as Christ's chosen worker. Grace allowed him to stand boldly in front of enemies; it allowed him to go to places where he was not welcome; it allowed him to preach confidently before all. Grace allowed Paul to not be distraught about his past, to not be overwhelmed by his circumstances, to not be disheartened by his troubles. How many churches did he start, how many souls did he bring to the Gospel, how many lives has he touched with his words, and it all happened for just one reason: The Grace of God.

Today, we have three people starting new jobs as teachers at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and School – and what a responsibility it is which they are entering into. Called by God to be servants in his church. Tasked with training Jesus' little lambs. Shouldered with the responsibility to hold to the truth of God's Word and to let the Gospel shine in their lives.

But they are not alone in being called. They are not alone in having a great responsibility placed upon them. Each of us, all of us, have been called to be Christ's ambassadors in this world. That duty of caring for the lost, of sharing the Gospel with the world, of letting Christ's light shine in our lives for all to see, it belongs to each one of us who is a disciple of Jesus.

And who of us is up to such a task?

NONE of us. Not one of us can possibly be what God wants us to be for him in this world. And that is because, like Paul, we are sinners; and those sins that fill our lives are often blatant, ugly, and repeated. We have weaknesses, we have faults, we are full of self-doubts. And deep in our hearts, though people might tell us how qualified and perfect we are for the job, we each know the truth about our sin-filled selves. There are so many reasons why you shouldn't be teachers, why I shouldn't be a pastor, why none of us should be ambassadors for Jesus Christ in this world.

And how easy it is to focus on ALL of those many reasons why we shouldn't be. How easy it is to let our sins and our weaknesses and our faults keep us from embracing the roles that Christ has given us. How often don't we let those reasons keep us from our work. We allow guilt to

weigh us down, we let self-doubts creep in, we let fears and uncertainties cripple us.

But for all the reasons that we might come up with as to why we shouldn't be Christ's ambassadors, the reality is that there is just ONE reason why we are. Each and every one of us is an ambassador for Jesus because of the Grace of God.

Grace has been poured out into our lives in the same way that it was given in abundance to the apostle Paul. Just as this man who was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man was giving undeserved love and forgiveness, so has each of us received that same blessing from our Savior Jesus because every sin of ours has been placed and been nailed to his cross. Just as Paul was given strength for every weakness and confidence for every doubt, so we have the gift of power and boldness given to us by our ever-equipping Savior.

And with every sin of ours wiped away, with every reason taken away for why we can't, we actually become perfect ambassadors for Christ because our lives show how the grace of God supersedes every human frailty. Paul put it this way as he once said, "Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness." Christ has chosen you to be teachers, he has chosen me to pastor, he has chosen you to be ambassadors, and that one reason means we are perfect for those roles.

If ever you are struggling with guilt, or wrestling with self-doubt, or wondering whether you really have part in Christ's kingdom, take out these words from Paul and read them as if they are your very own. The beauty of these words is that each one of us can read them, and by the grace of God, we are the subject.

For a sinner who has every reason to doubt himself, how assuring that we can speak these words just as confidently as Paul once did, ***"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here***

***is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Ti 1:12–15).***

Why would God, in his grace, do all of that for us? Paul tells us in verse 16 that there is just one reason: ***“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Ti 1:16).***

God’s purpose in bringing his grace into your life is so that you might be an example; a living testament to what God’s grace can accomplish. Everywhere that Paul went, people saw a man who was changed by the grace of God. People heard that they too could experience that change that is only possible by grace. Whether it is in our lives, in your classrooms, in the pulpit, God has made us his ambassadors, his teachers, his pastors. He has done so for just one reason: so that his grace might be seen. As people see what the grace of God is able to accomplish in our lives, may we provide witness that grace can change their lives as well. Amen.