

Preaching

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Titus 1:1-3

Preached On: Sunday, June 18, 2017

Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church

4515 Sandy Spring Road

Burtonsville, MD 20866

Website: www.trinityrpc.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/trinityrpc

Good morning. My family would covet your prayers as we have various members in stages of feeling like they're dying or looking like they're dying or sounding like they're dying. And I appreciate David leading worship. It's- it's good to sit amongst the congregation, to hear a little bit more of what you hear and the- those who have dropped our median age significantly in the last few months, get to hear them competing. And my arch-nemesis (or Tabitha, as she's known), she's the one that when people need attention in a room they think, "who can talk over this group of people?" and it's either me or Tabitha that seems to be the two that you need to get. She and I both can talk over a room of people and she's always a little more vocal if I don't have a chance to connect with her before the service. And so hi, Tabitha, I see you. I hope you're-- I hope you're listening today. Titus is where we are. Titus chapter 1 verses 1 through 3. And we'll be talking today about preaching. And this is the topic and the type of sermon that every preacher would hope that he is in his strength for. I am not in my strength today and so God proves His word even more exponentially of the weakness of preachers and the weakness of this thing that God has ordained to bless His people by. And so, if you would, turn with me to Titus chapter 1 verses 1 through 3. I'll be reading and preaching from the Modern English Version. "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began, and has in due time revealed His word through preaching, with which I was entrusted according to the command of God our Savior." The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

This morning I want to encourage you that the apostolic message stands for all time, that God has promised the life-changing gospel from the beginning. God has promised the life-changing gospel from beginning. And we'll be looking at three aspects of the power of preaching, of the power preaching. Its source, its service, and its servants. Its source, its service, and its servants. First of all, its source. Verse 3 begins: "and has in due time revealed His word..." What is the source of the power of preaching, of the preaching of this apostolic message that stands for all time? What is the source of this life-changing gospel that has been promised from the beginning? Well, the source is God Himself. And there are two aspects to this that are mentioned here by the apostle Paul. The aspect of what it is (revelation) and the aspect of when it is (in the fullness of time, in due time). Now, some of you have just come past due time. We've been hearing from your offspring in this morning's worship service and I love that. I love the family reunion feel of worship together. If you went to a family reunion and everybody sitting around was just of a certain age and a certain ability to sit still and a certain ability to pay attention at all times it would be a boring get together, wouldn't it? You'd think, "the shelf life of this family is-- seems to be getting shorter and shorter." I've watch my own family go through the transition where the next younger generation becomes the oldest generation. Everybody kinda moves up in a slot. I think the

Stewarts have recently gone through that transition where everybody in the room looks around and says, "Oh, we're it. We're responsible for this brood that is around us now." Whether it be grandchildren or nieces and nephews and- and great-grandchildren. Those- those dynamics change. But some of you have recently given birth. Some of you are awaiting that time. Who knows with this group, some of you might be waiting that time and not know it yet, who knows. But "in due time" brings great significance in this season of life and God had His perfect timing, as we will see. Well, this- this revelation that God has revealed Himself as the source of this power of preaching. First Peter 1:20, "He was foreordained before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for you." For generation after generation when each Hebrew woman would get pregnant she would wonder in her mind, "is this the One? Is this the One?" And, in a sense, they had a certain amount of knowledge, they had the job description, they knew what He would accomplish, they knew what He would do, but they didn't have a face and they didn't have a specific name. But finally, God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The- the book of Hebrews opens [vs 1-4], "God, who at various times and in diverse ways spoke long ago to the fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the world. He is the brightness of His glory, the express image of Himself, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He was made so much better than the angels as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." God has revealed His word through preaching. God Himself has preached to us, not only in the words of the prophets and in the words of the apostles, but He has revealed His word to us by preaching to us through His Son, the perfect prophet, the one who perfectly brought us the word of God, as He was Himself the living word of God. And He did this in the fullness of time.

Galatians 4 [vs 4-5], "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born from a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Ephesians 1 [vs 7-10], "In Him we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, which are in heaven and on earth." This is moderately an aside but, brothers and sisters, as Ephesians 1 describes to us the predestinating work of God in choosing a people for Himself, there is not a stinginess there. It is not uptight. It is not boring. I mean, just saying the word "lavish," it sounds like what it is. I mean, you- you say that word "lavish," you can-- you can almost imagine a rich table spread with fine meats (that's all I would need is- is fine meats that's-- you know, everything else is what food eats, right?). But fine meats and fresh salads and- and cold, refreshing drink. It's a picture of the gospel upon us, that- that at the perfect time, when all was right for all the prophecies to be fulfilled, God revealed Himself to us in the best and fullest way He could in God the Son becoming man. And Hebrews 1 touches on this as we read [vs 3a] "He is the brightness of His glory, the express image of Himself..." When you saw Jesus you were seeing the Father, not because we're oneness people (we believe in the tri-unity of God) but because Christ perfectly represented the holiness of God, the perfections of God, as He Himself was God, is God. And we see this in a very limited way in our children. You see a kid and you see their parent and you think, "oh my goodness, that is-- that is THEM." You might see it in yourself when you say something, you hear it come out of your mouth and you hear your mother or you hear your father and it's always that one phrase that you thought, "I will never say that to my kids," and not only do you use the exact same phrase, you use the exact same tone, and you sound exactly like them. Brothers and sisters, when Christ spoke, all who heard Him were hearing God speak. Christ is given to us in this book and when we open its pages and we read these words we are hearing Him speak to us. Perhaps you have spent time in your life wondering about what is right, what is true, what is real? If only God would just speak to me, if only God would just tell me what to do! He HAS in this book that one of our greatest dangers is

becoming so familiar with it we begin to brush it aside as just another topic, just as another course of study, not understanding that- that when we open its pages it's like the breath of God blowing on us. We're- we're so close, we're so proximate to Him as we read these words we're hearing Him speak to us. God has revealed Himself to us, He is the source of the power of preaching. And all of this points to-- back to Him as the one who created time and controls circumstances, to understand the- the unfolding nature of revelation and coming to its pinnacle in the fullness of time and how it is flowed down to us in our generation. This is not the revelation of a God who happened to be in the right place at the right time so that His message kind of out- out- was out declared above the others. No, this is not that case at all. This is speaking of the one and true and living God and pointing to Him as the one who measures our days, who holds the span of our lives in His hands. He has revealed Himself to us, He is the source of the power of the preaching in the church, the preaching that Paul is- is speaking of, the preaching that he has-- that he has commissioned Titus to do on Crete.

Verse 3 goes on, "and has in due time revealed His word through preaching... The power of preaching is not only in its source but also in its service, in other words, what preaching is intended to do. Preaching is not an end to itself but it works in service of God's ends, of what He intends for preaching to accomplish. Preaching is a means, it's a means of grace to be exact, and we see in this section what God intends to accomplish through it. We've seen of knowledge, of faith, of godliness, of hope, of eternal life, all of these are things that God wants to bring to the believer in the act of preaching. The larger catechism we're asked [Q. 155], "How is the Word made effectual to salvation?" and the answer comes, "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation." We might arrive at this answer with a different question that asks, "what should be going on in this room during this time when preaching is happening?" And brothers and sisters, let me be clear that when a preacher talks about the power and the priority of preaching, it can begin to sound like a sales pitch. "This is why you need me." Well, you- you do need me and I need you, that's how the body of Christ works. But brothers and sisters, we could live on in willful ignorance of what should be happening when the preaching of the Word is going on and began to miss it and begin to just come and sit numbly through this time. Behold, the Word was preached and now let us enter into the fellowship hall for coffee. Let us go out unto our jobs and know that next week the Word shall be preached again. What should be going on right now as the Word is preached? Some of you should be enlightened. That means that some of you are living more darkly than you should and the light hasn't quite come on on some aspect of the faith and it's shadowy and it's- and it's hazy and it's like at dusk when-- "what is that I'm seeing across the road? What is that?" Some of you should be convinced. That means you're not convinced right now. And for some it might be willing to admit that you aren't convinced. Be honest with yourself, be honest with me. You don't have to come and just go through the motions. If you are not convinced, let's- let's have it out, let's talk about it, let's hear it, let's work through it. This next one's just for the preacher, I think, humbling sinners. That means some of us are living pridefully in our sin and we need to be reminded of what that sin is doing to us. We need to be driven out of ourselves. That means that some of us are sitting here today trusting in ourselves, either over against or more than we are trusting Christ. You're trusting the fact that you got up and came to worship today more than you are trusting the finished work of Christ on the cross to save you. You need to be drawn unto Christ. We need to be conformed to His image. We need to be more like Jesus when the preaching is done than we were when it began. We need to be subdued to His will. That means there may be a battle going on in the pew that you're in. And the young moms said, "Amen. There's always a battle going on in our pew." But remember moms, you don't wrestle against-- well you do wrestle against flesh and blood during the worship service, but that is not the final and

fullest wrestling. We wrestle against principalities and against powers and there are those who would choose to dominate your will and have you willfully live in subjection to anything other than Christ. And before you get too accusatory, remember that your own flesh is willing to play party in the conspiracy, to trick you, to fool you, to blind you, to lead you astray. Be mortifying the flesh. We need to be strengthened against temptations and corruptions. Temptations and corruptions will continue to come in your life. How do I know that? Because we're not doing your funeral. As long as you are alive temptation will come, corruption will come, sin will be present in you; but through the preaching of the Word we can be strengthened against those temptation, strengthened against those corruptions. We ought to be built up in grace. That seems to point to the fact that grace, both experiential for ourselves and given out generously to others, might not be a natural part of who we are. We must be built up in grace. Our hearts need to be established in holiness. Yes, He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. It is His working as we see holiness of any kind flow from our lives. And as the battle rages on we need comfort, comfort in this life and comfort for the life to come, through faith unto salvations.

Now that's an awful lot that needs to be happening while the preaching of the Word is going on and some Lord's days that might be all of it and other Lord's days it might be one or two things specifically, depending on what we're all wrestling with. But the word of God stands that it can and will do these things, not only in the reading but especially in the preaching. In Nehemiah 8 [vs 8] it says, "They read from the book, from the Law of God, with interpretation, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." Psalm 19 reminds us of all the things that God's word should be to us, that it rejoices the heart, it enlightens the eyes. Time and time again God's word reminds us of all that God's word can do. We're reminded that we should not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

We see the power of preaching in its source, we see the power preaching in its service, and we see the power of preaching in its servants. [vs 3b] "... with which I was entrusted according to the command of God our Savior." Paul was an apostle. I am not an apostle, I am an elder, I am a teaching elder, specifically. But again, that great apostolic work of leveling the field and reminding the lowliest of saints that we are all in the same faith, together. There aren't upper echelons and lower echelons and you peons live down there while we apostles live up here in the-- in the really good stuff. No, all the wine that flows from Christ is good wine. There's no cheap stuff. And when it comes to the servants of God the power of preaching is made all the more clear because of its source and because of the service that it renders in the work of God. A number of weeks ago we read Second Corinthians 4 [vs 1-15], which goes like this: "Therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy we have received, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the secret things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by expressing the truth and commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost. The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, the excellency of the power being from God and not from ourselves. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; and always carrying around in the body the death of the Lord Jesus, that also the life of Jesus might be expressed in our bodies. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that also the life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then, death works in us, but life in you. We have the same spirit of faith. As it is written, 'I believed, and therefore I have spoken.' So we also believe and therefore

speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us through Jesus and will present us with you. All these things are for your sakes, so that the abundant grace through the thanksgiving of many might overflow to the glory of God." That is Paul's theology of ministry, his theology of preaching, that it is all of Christ. And in reference to those who bring this glorious, beautiful message he says that we are merely jars of clay. We are pots that easily crack, we are dishes that easily break. Brothers and sisters, the power of preaching that we see in the servants who preach (guys like me) is that God's power is made perfect in weakness. There's no different faith for me on this side of the desk than there is for you in the pew. We are in this together. We will be raised up together. We will be presented together. We have been put in this body together. We have been gifted together. We serve Christ together. We are on mission together. We- we hear God's word together. And as you get to know ME, I trust you hope to get to know the power of Jesus all the more because you can say with those who have known guys like me for a long time, "if there's hope for him, there's hope for me." We hold this treasure in earthen vessels. It's not the-- it's not the box that the ring comes in, it's the ring. It's not the one who brings the message, it's the message. It's not the one being saved, it's the One who saves, who holds all the power and all the beauty and all the splendor and all the majesty. It's Him. It's Him. And Paul's already reminded us that this gospel is nothing new, that that which must be proclaimed, that that which God has revealed Himself through, this- this preaching with which he was entrusted, which he entrusted Titus with, has been promised from the beginning. A gospel of grace. A gospel that brings godliness. A gospel that brings hope of eternal life. A gospel of God, who cannot lie.

Stand with me as we pray.