

Anchored
A Sermon for October 9, 2016
2 Timothy 2:8-15
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

This morning I would like to continue on the track that we've been on for the last few weeks, considering the words that the apostle Paul speaks to Timothy. Last week, we looked at Paul's instruction to reignite the God's gift that was in him in order that he might join Paul in living his life fully for the sake of the gospel.

But living out the life of the good news entailed certain risks, including the risk of imprisonment, as well as physical and emotional suffering. And so in our reading this week, Paul speaks to Timothy in order to ensure he is anchored in the faithfulness of God and in the gospel of Christ.

Anchored.

In light of the scripture this morning I'd like for us to explore this image. Although the metaphor is not explicitly stated in the verses we read today, it is explicit elsewhere in the New Testament, as in Hebrews chapter 6. In speaking of the good news of Christ, and the reality that God is faithful to his promises, the writer says: "We have this *hope*, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."

It seems to me that first must understand why it is that we need an anchor.

Boats encounter essentially two scenarios where they need an anchor. The first is the simple but essential task of keeping the boat from drifting away. The second is to enable the boat to be stabilized and protect during a storm.

Indeed storms will come in life, and we will consider that metaphor shortly. But for now let's consider the more common use of an anchor: to guard the boat against the slow drift. This drift comes from being in a place as volatile as a large body of water. Anchors are needed either to keep the boat from drifting toward the rocky shore or to keep the boat from drifting aimlessly out into the waters.

You know that we have the tendency to drift away, don't you? You don't have to do anything at all. You just place a boat in the water, do nothing, and before you know it it's no where near where you left it.

For us humans, drifting is part of living as fallen humanity in a fallen world. Sure, if you want to stay put, you can paddle against the current from time to time. But sooner or later, you either get it wrong or else your tired self eventually succumbs to the pressure of the current-- you drift away from where you're supposed to be.

If you agree with me what we have the tendency to drift toward evil, then I would say that you're not only more biblically grounded than the broader culture, but you're also more realistic.

You see, since the 18th century or so, Western culture has had a particular way of telling our human story. This period was called the Age of Enlightenment. With the expansion of several new brands of

philosophy and scientific exploration came a deification of Reason-- people made Reason in a god. And with this came a distrust, or even a hatred, toward the church.

(As an aside, I'm guessing that many of you have encountered the so-called New Atheism. Those who aren't just atheist, but they're against people who believe in God. I know that this seems like a new thing, but really it's quite old. In the late 1700s the "Cult of Reason" emerged in France. Churches were changed into "Temples of Reason" and church liturgy was replaced with acts of devotion to Liberty and Truth. This actually happened-- you can look it up!)

But at the core of Enlightenment thinking is the premise that since we humans have achieved so much through our use of reason-- through our Philosophy and our Science-- now we now in a "Modern" period of time. And the key trait of this period is an inevitable "progress" built into the fabric of our society. What was old is bad. What is new is better. And given enough time, our wonderful Enlightened selves will create Eutopia on earth. Such thinking agrees that we drift, but it counters that "it's in a good direction!"

This narrative is so optimistic and compelling that the church itself got caught up in it quite fully by the end of the 19th century. And yet one only has to look at the horrors of the first and second world wars to understand that this way of telling our human story does not appropriately take account of our fallen human tendency to sin.

The truth taught by scripture is consistent with the reality we experience in our lives: if we put our faith in humanity, we will be disappointed.

Apart from an appropriate anchor, humanity will drift dangerously to the shore or to the sea, and we won't realize that it's happening until something awful transpires.

Even in calm weather, my brothers and sisters, we need an anchor. Even in the safety of a harbor, we need to be anchored, so we don't get caught up by the forces that cause us to drift.

But this brings me to the other reason that we need an anchor. As Hurricane Matthew reminds us this week, we will indeed face many literal and metaphorical storms. A boat that is not appropriately anchored will certainly be lost in the storm. But if the boat is appropriately anchored, then even as the wind howls and the waves crash, the boat will stay upright and stay put.

Paul anticipated that Timothy would encounter times as he strove to live out the gospel, where he would be in the middle of storm. Like Paul, he would be mocked for boasting in the cross-- the execution device reserved for slaves and rebels. He would be beaten because of the false claim that he was perverting the religion of Israel. He would be imprisoned for teaching that Jesus was Lord, which meant that Caesar was not. If Timothy did not have the appropriate anchor, he would not be able to survive the ordeals to come.

We need an anchor. But most people understand that they need an anchor when storms come. They recognize that they will not survive unless they hold on to something. Unfortunately for many people, the thing that they hold onto is a bottle. Or a needle. Or a pill. They anchor themselves with relationships-- casual or committed. They anchor

themselves with entertainment-- TV, Movies, Sports, Video games. But all of these anchors have nothing to do with reality as it is. These anchors are a mere escape from reality, but in the end, they do not help us to endure the real storm.

Paul, on the other hand, has a true anchor. As Hebrews says, it is a sure and steadfast anchor. Paul's anchor is hope.

First, let's talk about what Biblical hope isn't. First of all, it's not the same as optimism. Those who think like people from the Enlightenment think that things are just going to progress and get better. History has shown us, however, that that optimism is an empty promise. Sure we may advance technologically and be able to provide fantastic solutions to problems that have plagued humanity for a long time. But people will still worship the unholy trinity: money, sex, and power. And worshipping these false gods always brings injustice. That injustice, in turn, will largely always be borne by the most vulnerable among us.

Biblical hope isn't just wishful thinking. Usually when we say that "we hope" for something, we're just saying that we wish something would be true. In the supermarket: "I hope you have a good day." After passing a cop on the highway: "I hope he didn't catch me speeding." That type of hope is simply wishful thinking. It's optimism applied to a particular situation.

But optimism doesn't tend to account for reality. Optimism tells you that the cancer diagnosis isn't that bad. Hope says, "no, it is bad! Nevertheless I won't drift away from God in this storm."

Hope is not telling yourself that everything will be ok. We don't know if everything will be ok here and now. Some sicknesses are fatal, sometimes you have to be imprisoned, and some persecutions end in martyrdom. Reality is that things very well might not be ok. Christian hope as Paul lays it out, does not deny that reality.

But what our anchor is made out of matters. If it's made out of wishful thinking, it will fail us. Biblical hope is not wishful thinking.

But as important as what your anchor is, what may be even more important is where you drop your anchor.

Some folks set their hope-anchor in idea of "progress." "Things will get better," they say. Others set their hope-anchor in politics. It's hard to understand that one this time around, can I get a witness?, but I hear it's still happening. Lord have mercy!

Christians, however, anchor themselves in a different place. Biblical hope is anchored in the solid ground of a relationship with the Lord Jesus. The New Testament witnesses that we don't just hope in the future, we don't just hope for the future, but we hope *from* the future. We hope *from* the future because in the resurrection of Jesus Christ our future has already been secured, and God brings that future reality, that resurrection life, into the present.

We want things to go well with us now. We want comfort and health. We want and strive for peace and justice and reconciliation. We desire to elect the right people to govern us.

But I can tell you this, my brothers and sisters, who ends up in the White House doesn't matter near as much as who *wasn't* in the tomb on Easter morning. And whose presidential portrait is the next to *hang* in the National Portrait Gallery pales in importance to who it was that hung on a cross.

This is essentially what Paul tells Timothy. Verse 8 says, "Remember Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and descended from David. This is my good news." Whatever else is good news about the gospel, Paul tells Timothy to remember this.

Paul doesn't know what living out the good news of Jesus will mean for Timothy, but he sees the real likelihood that he is going to encounter difficulties. There will be pressures from the culture to make the teaching more palatable. There very well may be violence done to him. There will be false teachers. And in all of these things, Paul wants Timothy to have a *good* anchor set in a *good* place.

And so Paul holds out the good news of Jesus the Jewish Messiah, who was a descendant of David-- a member of the royal line, who was crowned in his crucifixion and vindicated by his resurrection.

But what is it about the resurrection that brings Paul hope?

Paul tells us in verses 11 and 12.

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;

If we have died with him, we will also live with him. Paul is referring here to baptism, as he explains in Romans 6:3-4.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

This understanding of baptism is vividly symbolized by immersion. The body goes down into the water as a body into the grave. The body is then raised up into new life.

Through baptism we associate ourselves with the death and resurrection of Christ. His death becomes our death. His victory becomes our victory. And when we stay tethered to that anchor, nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;

Hope is the reason that we endure all types of sufferings.

Paul says, "Therefore I endure everything." Think you have a thankless job? Paul had the most thankless of thankless jobs. And yet he had certain hope-- faith in God's future resurrection vindication--empowering his present, giving him the power to endure anything for the sake of the one who, as Paul says, "loved me and gave himself for me."

I'm nearly done.

But the saying that Paul gives Timothy then takes a turn.

if we deny him, he will also deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

In Matthew chapter 10 Jesus says, Everyone... who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

How often do we see people who don't believe and we think the problem is with God? But the gospel is the same no matter how many believe. If the politicians do not believe, Jesus Christ is the same. If the philosophers don't believe, the gospel remains unchanged. If public opinion is against Jesus, Jesus is still Lord of heaven and earth.

Whether we deny him or not, Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Faithful.

It's not for his own sake that he died. Jesus wants you to put your hope in him for your sake alone. He enduring suffering and death for you. The anchor does not need the boat. The boat needs the anchor. You need the anchor.