

Sermon
1 November 2015
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: 2 Timothy 2:14-16 & 20-26

(Stewardship: Talents)

2 Timothy is a letter of encouragement and instruction written by the apostle Paul to his co-worker, Timothy.

Timothy met Paul on one of his many travels and his encounter with Paul made him come to faith in God. He started travelling with Paul and learnt a lot from him, and as time went on got more and more responsibilities to handle by himself. Paul left Timothy behind in Ephesus to sort out some issues in the congregation there, and that's where he was when he received this letter.

In the meantime Paul was taken captive and thrown into prison in Rome. It's from here that he is writing to Timothy and reminding him what God expects of him, as well as what he should teach the people around him.

Paul could just as well have addressed this letter to each one of us personally, because in it he explains *exactly* what God expects of those who belong to him.

Paul says: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

A workman.

I love the way Paul teaches! He doesn't describe Timothy as a holy man, someone very special because he is working for God. No, he calls him a workman: an ordinary guy who works for his Boss.

But in this case the *Boss* is no ordinary guy – it is God himself!

A couple of weeks ago I heard my 2 boys arguing about who the boss is in our house! “Of course it's mummy! No silly, it's daddy! It's not, it's mummy. It's daddy. It's mummy. It's daddy!” I was quite curious to see what the outcome of this argument was going to be, so I popped my head around the door and asked: “So, who is it then?” To which Nehan, the wee one, very innocently replied: “Actually mummy, it's not you or daddy, it's God.”

Amen to that! The innocence of a child... Of course it's not mummy or daddy, it is God.

The rest of us are the workmen, and women!

We've got important work to do here on earth for our “Boss”.

We need to remind ourselves and others not to argue about words; to avoid godless chatter; to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.

We should avoid foolish arguments and we shouldn't quarrel with others.

Instead, we should be kind to everyone, able to teach and we shouldn't be resentful.

That's our job description, according to Paul.

We don't need any qualifications to do this job – we are born with the ability to do it and to do it well.

But we are also born with the ability to choose. And if we choose not to do the things God expects us to do, we won't be able to present ourselves to God as “one approved, who does not need to be ashamed”...

Paul then goes ahead and uses another metaphor to describe how we should do our work here on earth. He says that in a large house there are articles made of lots of different materials. There are articles made of gold and silver, but also articles made of wood and clay. Some of these articles are made for noble purposes; others are made for ignoble purposes.

Noble and ignoble are opposites. So this means that some of these articles are special and others are not. Some of these articles are used to do special things with and others are not.

This refers back to us again. God wants to use us here on earth. But he doesn't want to use us for just anything, he wants to use us for *noble purposes*.

This boils down to choice again. It doesn't matter, metaphorically speaking, what we are *made* of, whether we are made of gold, silver, wood, or clay – it matters what we are *used for*.

In our day to day life we use different articles for different things. Here at the church, for instance, the wheelie bins are used for ignoble purposes, but the communion cup, on the other hand, is used for noble purposes. Which one do you want to be?

In Biblical times it was a wee bit more complicated than that. If anything that belonged to God came in contact with something that was unholy, like the rubbish in a wheelie bin, that article would become unholy too. No matter whether a jar was made of silver or clay, for instance – if it carried any unholy substance, it would become unclean and had to go through ritual cleansing before it could be used for God’s purposes again. If it wasn’t cleansed, it couldn’t be used anymore and was eventually discarded.

We are vessels similar to that. Within us we carry emotions; we make decisions. We have all been set apart by God to be used by Him, and to make sure that we are holy and cleansed; he poured his Spirit out within us. So not a single one of us has the excuse that we are not special enough to be used by God, because he himself has cleansed us.

It doesn’t matter what kind of a person you are, what you are good at, how much you have accomplished in life and how many people look up to you – gold, silver, wood or clay – that doesn’t matter at all.

What matters is how you choose to be used by God. Do you want to be the wheelie bin? Who only carries rubbish around, day in and day out? Who eventually gets so filthy that it’s almost impossible to get you clean again?

Or do you want to be the communion cup? Sparkling clean, carrying the message of God’s love from person to person?

It's up to you – you can choose how you want to live. You *have* to choose how you want to live, because you can't be somewhere in-between.

In our daily lives we have certain articles that can sometimes be used for noble purposes and sometimes not, like a carrier bag. We can use a carrier bag to carry something special and brand new that we bought in the shops, but that same carrier bag can then later be used to line the kitchen bin.

We can't be like that. You can't be holy *and* unholy, indecisive, one person when you are at a party and a different person when you are at the church.

We need to take a stand and always be who we are meant to be – instruments of noble purposes.

So we've spoken about our purposes here on earth now. But listen to this carefully: We need to be *instruments* of noble purposes. Not *ornaments* of noble purposes.

God wants to use us, to do things with us, to work through us.

He doesn't want us to just sit on a shelf and look holy; he wants us to live life fully, to really get *in* there, but to do this in the right way.

We are of no use to him if we say that we are Christians, but that's all we do. We need to go out into the world and live our lives fully, but do this in a way that will make him proud.

Then we will be instruments of noble purposes, because then we will be showing everybody around us how meaningful it can be to belong to God. How life changing it can be to have a purpose here on earth. And not just any purpose, a *noble* purpose.

According to my computer, synonyms for the word 'noble' are honourable, principled, moral, decent, upright, gallant, polite, and self-sacrificing.

Here in the church there are people who have been chosen to do specific jobs – elders, members of the board, the people who take care of the children, the money, the people who sing in the choir, arrange the flowers, clean the church, play the organ, do the readings and prayers, do the teas and coffees – each one of you have been called by God to do this job, so do it as best you can, be instruments of noble purposes in his hands.

Other people here might not have one specific job in the church, but are always happy to help with whatever is going on here – God is using you, be instruments of noble purposes in his hands.

And others might not have specific jobs here in the church at all, but have to proclaim God in the world out there through what you do and say. God is using you – be instruments of noble purposes in his hands.

If you are sitting here this morning and feel as if you are just a wheelie bin, if you feel worthless and dirty – don't despair! Through the blood of Jesus you can be cleansed, you can be changed. He came for ALL of us. Choose now to be changed, and feel the Spirit of God dwelling within you.

No matter what kind of a job you do, you need the right tools, the right instruments, to get your job done properly. No soldier will go to war without his gun, no doctor will go to hospital without his stethoscope, no teacher will go to school without her books and pens.

Just as we use certain instruments to get *our* jobs done properly – God wants to use *us* as his instruments, to do his job here on earth.

To spread the message of his love and salvation. What a privilege we have to be used as instruments in God's hands!

We are his scaffolding when major repair work has to be done in the lives of others, we are his tweezers when sensitive matters have to be discussed, we are glasses when people struggle to see him in their lives, we are crutches when others are struggling to walk in the right direction.

This is a huge responsibility... But how *amazing* is it to be used by God to get his job done properly here on earth! We are instruments in the hands of God – let's always be instruments for noble purposes.

Amen