



ANiC Calgary Project Sermons

May 1, 2011

"God's Firm Foundation"

¹⁴Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. ¹⁵Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. ¹⁶But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

²⁰Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

²²So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

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In *"The Hobbit"* the main character is Bilbo. When a younger Hobbit, Bilbo was bright-eyed and curious, always eager for news of the outside world. But as Bilbo grew older, he became rather complacent. Life had become very comfortable in the Shire and so when Gandalf the Wizard arrived one spring morning in 2941 talking of adventure, the Wizard did not find Bilbo interested in taking him up on his invitation. In what I think is one of the greatest lines in *"The Hobbit"* Bilbo counters Gandalf's invitation to come on an adventure with the quip:

"We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them."

Nasty and disturbing making one late for dinner, such are the inconveniences adventures bring! As the story unfolds, Bilbo does join Gandalf and the dwarves Fili, Kili, Oin, Gloin, Dwalin, Balin, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Dori, Nori, Ori, and Thorin on the adventure of a lifetime. It is to hunt down the dragon Smaug and reclaim from him the treasure he had stolen from the dwarves. By story's end, they have retrieved the treasure, and Bilbo returns to the Shire a wealthier and wiser Hobbit than when he left. Well, here we are meeting in a new setting and although it is not Middle Earth for we are too tall to be either hobbits or dwarves we are also on an adventure. Although we won't be late for dinner, the Eucharist will be over by 3 PM, we had to eat an early lunch because of our unfamiliar meeting time of 1 PM.

Like Bilbo, some of us might be experiencing a certain reluctance at being away from the comfort and familiarity of St. Augustine's at 8:30 or 10:30 AM. If you are feeling this way today, I appreciate the reasons for this discomfort. Bilbo is right, adventures can be nasty, disturbing and uncomfortable. And yet they are also filled with new opportunity and expectation that the routine of predictability does not contain.

So welcome to the adventure of being part of the Anglican Network in Canada. As we study today it is my hope that for those of you who are unsettled, and yes, also for those who are settled and are ready for the adventure, by the time I am done teaching we will all have a better understanding of why we have embarked on this adventure. To give us insight into the why of our adventure I will be looking at 2 Timothy 2:12-22 with you this afternoon, concentrating especially on verses 19-22. In these verses, Paul speaks to our current situation with a precision that has helped me better understand why we are here today.

This is the letter Paul wrote soon before he was killed for his faith during the time of the Emperor Nero. Although in a Roman jail and anticipating his death is near, he has a view of the church which soars above the confines of his cell. At verse 19 he refers to the Church as "God's firm foundation". In a verse from First Timothy Paul had said of the Church:

"It is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."¹

or as The Message puts it:

"God's household, this God-alive church, bastion of truth."

Paul understands the Church as that fellowship of people who are God-alive and the one community in the world whose foundation is built on the truth of God's commands and promises.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (1 Ti 3:15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society

With this high view of the Church Paul tell us that there is a twofold inscription written on the foundation. One part of the inscription guarantees:

**the Church's security
and the other the Church's purity.**

So he writes in verse 19:

19But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

The security of those who are members of this God-alive body is based on knowing "we are his". Stemming from this security, we are then able to read the inscription relating to purity because those who name the name of the Lord will choose to depart from iniquity,

Security in knowing to whom we belong has as its spiritual and ethical consequence lives that are marked by purity, resulting in a departure from iniquity.

Now this word "depart" in English sounds pretty tame. To depart means to leave. However the meaning of the original Greek is far stronger. It means:

"To start a revolt, a revolution"

What is a revolution?

"A revolution is an act of uprising"

May I suggest that this is the kind of revolution that the Anglican Network in Canada has initiated. ANiC congregations have consciously decided to say no to the theological and moral drift within the Anglican Church of Canada. Something we can term as iniquity.

Already I hope you are seeing more clearly why we have embarked on this adventure into ANiC. After months, and in some cases years of thoughtful study and prayerful deliberation we have made a clear and intentional decision to depart from the iniquity so characteristic of the Anglican Church of Canada. We want to be part of a jurisdictional body where the inscription of security, of knowing whose we are, allows us to become people who delight in learning the way of godliness in how we live. This verse makes it so clear that security and purity are intricately related. So let me summarize what I have said this far.

The more we grow in purity the more we will know the Lord's security. The more we rest secure in Him the more we will choose to depart from iniquity and embrace the way of purity.

This is the governing idea in Paul's thought here and he goes over the same ground with a different metaphor in verse 20. The foundation metaphor of verse 19 is replaced by a household metaphor of honourable and dishonourable vessels in verse 20-21.

20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use.

The picture which the apostle is conjuring up is clear. Every house is equipped with vessels or utensils of different kinds, pots and pans and dishes and the like. In a 'great house' or stately mansion these are many and varied. They may be divided approximately into two groups. There are the 'vessels of gold and silver', which are 'for noble use', possibly 'for special occasions' and in particular for the personal service of the master of the house. There are also vessels 'of wood and earthenware', which, apart from being of cheaper quality in themselves, are reserved for ignoble or menial use in the kitchen and the scullery.

To what is the apostle alluding by this metaphor? There can be little doubt that the 'great house' is God's house, the visible or professing church. But what are the 'vessels'? The use of the term elsewhere in the New Testament suggests that they stand not simply for members of the church, but for the church's teachers. For example, Jesus had said to Ananias about the newly converted Saul of Tarsus:

'he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel' (Acts 9:15). 5

Years later Paul described himself and his fellow-workers by a similar image when he wrote:

'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor. 4:7).

In these verses 'instrument' and 'vessel' translate the same Greek word "skeuos", This is Paul's word used in his letter to Timothy. A "skeuos" was any kind of utensil. As a 'vessel' Paul's function was to carry Christ's name before unbelievers, and in the earthenware vessel he carried the treasure of the gospel, as a fragile pottery lamp carries the light.

From this usage I think we would be justified in concluding that the two sets of vessels in the great house (gold and silver for noble use, wood and earthenware for ignoble) represent not genuine and spurious members of the church but true and false teachers in the church. Paul is still, in fact, referring to the two sets of teachers he has contrasted in the previous paragraph, the authentic like Timothy and the bogus like Hymenaeus

and Alexander. The only difference is that he changes the metaphor from good and bad workmen to honourable and dishonourable vessels.

We are to cleanse ourselves from false teachers and in turn we are to be vessels for honourable use. Here again we see the theme of purity as central to the calling of the disciple of Jesus. To cleanse ourselves 'from what is dishonourable is to purge the falsehood of those teachers from our minds and their wickedness from our hearts and lives. This is why at verse 16 Paul writes:

16But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, 17and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

When we receive false teaching it leads the hearer into more ungodliness and as we have seen purity of doctrine and purity of life is the essential condition of being serviceable to Christ.

It is because we want to be more serviceable to Christ that we have aligned with the Anglican Church in North America of which the Anglican Network in Canada is one of its dioceses. Within ANiC there is a willingness to be vessels for honourable use. To be vessels for honourable use is then described in three ways in verse 21:

- 1. set apart as holy,***
- 2. useful to the master of the house,***
- 3. ready for every good work.***

Here again we are brought to the theme of purity. Those who are vessels for honourable use are set apart as holy. This means we understand our lives are to be lived in such a way that we are different from the world. Rather conforming to the world, we want to lead lives where we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can be useful to the master of the house, the Lord.

Here again is the theme of purity and security expressed in these two ideas. To be set apart means that we desire to be people of purity. Knowing we are useful to the master provides us with the security of being in His will. From this position of purity and security we can be ready of every good work. This theme is then reiterated in verse 22 where Paul says we are to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

We see here then why we have set out on this adventure. It is an adventure where we desire to know and live out the security and purity the Lord wills for us. This means we are both to run away from spiritual danger and to run after spiritual good, both to flee

from the one in order to escape it and to pursue the other in order to attain it. This double duty of Christians— negative and positive—is the consistent, reiterated teaching of Scripture. Thus, we are to deny ourselves and to follow Christ.

We are to put off what belongs to our old life and to put on what belongs to our new life. We are to put to death our earthly members and to set our minds on heavenly things. We are to crucify the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. It is the ruthless rejection of the one in combination with the relentless pursuit of the other which Scripture enjoins upon us as the secret of holiness. Only so can we hope to be fit for the Master's use.

If the promise is to be inherited ('he will be a vessel for noble use'), the condition must be fulfilled ('if any one purifies himself from what is ignoble).

By leaving the Anglican Church of Canada we have purified ourselves from what is ignoble. By becoming part of the Anglican Network in Canada we are stating our desire to be vessels for noble use. This desire to be offered for noble use is stated so clearly in ANiC's Mission and Vision

Mission: Building Biblically faithful, Gospel sharing, Anglican churches.

We will not only be used by God to build new churches, but will also build-up existing churches. These churches will be fully Anglican, biblically faithful, evangelizing and discipling communities.

Vision: Every region, enduring churches, excellence in leadership, equipped members

We believe God is calling us to have churches from coast-to-coast, accessible to most Canadians. We will pray and plan that the churches will thrive until Jesus returns. We will humbly seek to be servant leaders always desiring to grow and learn the best practices. We desire to have every person in our congregation growing in Christ.

So welcome to this adventure where together we will come to know more of the security that is ours in Christ as we offer ourselves to Him in lives of growing purity.

Oh and by the way, enjoy your dinner.