

Text: II Timothy 4:7-8

Theme: Have You Got Your Work Done?

October 23, 2016

Growing up on a farm, my brothers and I always had chores that needed to be done. Before we could do other things, the chores had to be finished. As I reflect back, I remember times when my Mom would ask, "Do you have your chores done?" and I knew very well what the answer had to be before I could go or do anything else. In today's text, Paul, in his old age, speaks to Timothy, a young Pastor, as he essentially says, "I've got my work done; how about you?"

I. To remain prepared for our crown, our Lord reminds us that we have work that needs to be done. A. However, all too frequently, we think we already have our work done. 1. We think we have our work done because we've done some good works. If Paul were here among us this morning and we said, "Hey, Paul, I just want you to know that I've done my share of good works over the years, so I'm good to go," how would Paul react? After he stopped shaking his head in a negative manner and giving us that look, Paul would say, "You've got it all wrong. If you think doing some good works means you've got your work done, you are in for a dramatic surprise!"

2. We think we have our work done because we're not like those other people. We know all about those other people, don't we? The Pharisees also knew all about those other people. They knew they were better than, more intellectual than, and more likely to be blessed by God because they were so good by comparison. "God, I thank you that I'm not like other people." Behind the scenes where no one outwardly notices, we prefer to think we aren't like those other people, those sinners, those really bad sinners who are like that other guy in our Gospel. And because we are better, we've got our work done because we're a step above the other guy.

3. We think we have our work done because we've kept our definition of faith. I don't know if you noticed it or not, but there are more definitions for faith today than there are churches in any town in the state! If you don't like the definition or the expectations connected to a definition, you can simply rewrite it a bit until it fits you. God isn't impressed with how well we've kept our definition or how craftily we have rewritten His definition. Unlike the other guy in our Gospel, we can tell ourselves that we've done pretty good, that we've kept the faith by our definition but our work is only done when we keep the faith, not our revised version of the faith.

B. How, then, do we finish the work our Lord has begun in us? 1. We finish by standing at the foot of the cross. How many times did Paul stand at the foot of the cross seeking guidance, direction, insight, strength, and everything he needed to survive the day? Before Paul could make such a bold statement as found in our text, he had to bow in confession, in repentance, seeking God's forgiveness and His guidance for the day ahead. To finish our Lord's work, we begin each day at the cross admitting our weaknesses, our inability, seeking God's forgiveness, asking God to empower us to do what we can only do in that day with Him blazing the way.

2. We finish our work by discarding our grudges. After the Fall into sin, what caused the next major disaster and so many disasters since that time? We're reminded in our Old Testament lesson. Cain's grudge killed his only brother. Today, we can say, "But grudges don't interfere with getting my work done." Yet

Paul and young Timothy and our Lord would all disagree. To fight the good fight isn't to have the last word or to hold that grudge as pay back. Fighting the good fight is fighting to keep the faith alive in a country that is doing all it can to toss faith out the window as useless. The only way to get our work done is to discard the grudges.

3. We finish our work by defending the faith within our own community. How many events within our community have compromised our faith? What happened to prayer in school? What about Wednesday night as church night? What about sporting events being scheduled on Sunday mornings? Need we continue our list? Every year, our faith is being compromised little by little. Why? Because the Christian community has stopped speaking, stopped standing for the faith. If we don't stand up and defend our faith in appropriate ways, soon no one will be left who values faith enough to gather in this place to worship and honor our great God.

4. We finish our work by growing in our faith. Remember Paul? He was once Saul, the expert on faith demolition. When that miraculous transformation occurred, did Paul suddenly receive perfect knowledge of the faith? From the moment Saul became Paul, his life was a learning process; he was a student of the Word until he took his last breath. You and I may not be like Paul, yet we've got a lot to learn, more to learn that can be taught in Sunday School or Catechism Class. For the rest of your life, you are a student. You may not pay tuition and take out student loans, but as we do our work, we do so as students who can't wait to learn something new every day.

5. We finish our work by running daily toward the finish line. As Paul nears the end of his life, he tells Pastor Timothy that he has finished the race. But when did he finish? Twenty years ago, five years ago? Paul finished his race the moment his life ended and not a moment before. Paul is speaking of an event that is about to occur and Timothy understood Paul's words. To be about our work, we must run our race. Not some days, not on Sundays, but every day. If you aren't running the race, it's impossible to finish the race. To get our work done, our God says, "Run it today, tomorrow, and every day that follows. This is the one race you can't afford not to run!"

6. We get our work done by being convinced that the crown is waiting. How sure are you that you will receive your crown of life? If you don't believe the crown is guaranteed by faith, if eternity in heaven doesn't exist, you have lived this life for nothing. We know the words, but the important question is one of belief, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life?" Do you believe it? Do you believe the cross was for you, that because of the cross, the faith worked in your heart at your Baptism and sustained over the years, thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit, will lead you to your crown of life? Your answer will tell you if you've got your work done or not.

7. Getting those chores done before I could do anything else may have seemed important. But what matters in this moment and every moment to follow is our answer to the question Paul implied but never asked, "Have you got your work done?" Amen.