

"Honor"

Text: 2 Timothy 2:20-26

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

The coat of arms of the United States Military Academy (West Point) features a plumed helmet against a red, white, and blue standard. Atop the standard is an eagle with spears in its talons, and on either side a flowing banner with the West Point motto: *"Duty, honor, country."*

To far too many of our fellow-citizens today those are just words. To others – both military and civilian – they represent a way of life and code of conduct. Stop for just a moment this morning and consider those words: *"Duty, honor, country."* Of all the words that could have been chosen by our most prestigious military academy, why these? "Duty" and "country" we would probably expect, but what of the third? What of honor? Why was that chosen to complete the triad?

Honor differs from the others in that it must be supplied by the individual. "Duty" is imposed on a human being by a superior and "country," of course, represents all that the soldiers and citizens love and seek to protect and defend. "Honor" must be supplied by the individual if the whole is to survive.

There is more. Anyone who has ever been part of a team knows the faith and trust teammates have to have in each other. In the case of soldiers, their very lives depend on their fellow soldiers doing what they are supposed to do when they are told to do it. When the order is given to charge, every man has to be able to trust that he will not be alone when he rises from the trench to face death. Men without honor cannot be trusted; men *with* honor can.

The same scenario plays out in our circles of life every day. In this congregation, for example, members trust that they will not be alone in shouldering the burdens of maintaining a Christian congregation with their time and treasure. Honor is that Christian virtue that doesn't allow someone else to pay my way so that I can spend my money on my own personal desires, or that another must work alone to maintain the church so that I can play. Honor among Christians means no one has to dwell on

what others are doing, being confident that honorable people will do what they can.

Would that we were all consistently honorable. That is how we ought to be. That is what our God should be able to see in each of us. Too often it is sadly lacking. This morning we will take some time to examine the basic Christian virtue the world knows as "honor." The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the Second Chapter:

2 Timothy 2:20-26 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ²³ But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. ²⁴ And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

These are God's Words. To remind ourselves of the absolute truth of these words, and to ask for our God's blessing as we consider this text, we pray, ***"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord, Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

The utterly disgraceful spectacle that we are currently witnessing in our nation's capital is a stark reminder that our country, our society, is absolutely awash in corruption and dishonor. As bad as we all knew things were in Washington DC, what we have witnessed in the last several weeks is nothing short of appalling - inexcusable. The elected leaders who are running our country have given up even the pretense of honor or truthfulness. The farmer has filled the trough and every pig is going to get his.

This is exactly what happens in the absence of honor. Men and women no longer think in terms of "duty" and "country," but of me and mine. Once that starts, once honor is found to be lacking among our leaders, the country will fail. This is an incontrovertible rule of history. Dishonor and corruption killed every civilization in history.

In fact our country could not even have been born in the absence of honor. The Founding Fathers knew this, which is why they added these lines to the Declaration of Independence: *“And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”*

But why, you might well be wondering at this point, are we discussing such things *in the Sunday sermon*? Setting aside for a moment the fact that Christians ought to be the very best citizens of this or any other country and have a sacred trust to actively participate in our “we the people” government, understand well that these are not political issues; these are *moral* issues.

And the very same filth that we see so openly in Washington is manifesting itself also in our own hearts and lives. We too are in danger, therefore, of losing sight of just how vital and important something like honor is among God’s people. Our text will help remind us this morning.

First a word about the word itself. Honor has to be defined, since there are two very different kinds. One – the good kind – is a character trait that the Holy Spirit works within us and is roughly synonymous with *integrity*. The other is generally a self-serving word that describes what self-aggrandizing individuals would like to gain from others, and is roughly synonymous with *praise* or *glory*. The world, in fact, routinely honors those who have talent, but no honor. I saw this very thing recently when a room full of Hollywood types joined to honor a talented actor who was a known adulterer and philanderer. There is great irony in the fact that the world craves honor, even in the absence of honor.

Our text speaks of a very high sort of honor when it begins with these words: ***“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”***

These words from our God through the pen of the Apostle Paul teach us something we dare not forget about honor: along with every good thing on this earth, it is a gift from God. That means that as good and commendable as “honor” is among unbelievers, true, Godly honor can only be the possession of a Christian when God gives it to him. It is a fruit of faith.

But didn’t Paul in our text say that a man must ***“cleanse himself”*** and thus become a ***“vessel for honor”***? Understand what Paul is saying here. He is not saying that a man must cleanse himself and thereby make himself honorable; he is reminding us that that is what honorable Christians do – they cleanse or drive from their hearts and lives everything that is dishonorable. That’s not what makes them honorable, that’s what makes them fit vessels for service to their God, ***“prepared for every good work.”*** That’s also why our text goes on to remind honorable Christians to ***“flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”***

In our text Paul uses a common household analogy to clarify what he means. Take a look around your house and you will notice that there are very different jars, containers, and receptacles that are used for very different purposes. Think of the difference between a mixing bowl and a bed pan, or the vegetable crisper and the garbage can (although some young people seem think both hold the same thing).

The point here is that we are supposed to take that household picture and carry it into our walk as children or ambassadors of our God. Our calling dictates a higher, nobler form of service. This has nothing to do with physical dirt; it has everything to do with moral and spiritual filth. Yet just like the West Point sort of “honor,” Christian honor has to come from within. It has to be an element of our character, never a forced adherence to some imposed code of conduct.

Here’s a rather simplistic example. You are rummaging around in a table full of old books that are part of a little old lady’s yard sale when you happen upon a very old first edition book that is actually signed by its famous author. Despite its 25 cent price tag, you know the book is worth hundreds, if not thousands of dollars. You would be entirely within your legal rights to pay the quarter she is asking, and then turn around and sell the book on eBay at an obscene profit. No one would ever know – except you. And God. You know full well that it would be a moral violation of God’s Seventh Commandment, since you would in no way be *“helping your neighbor to improve and protect her property.”*

Unfortunately our society is awash in such disgraceful conduct, and the danger is that we too seem to be beginning to adopt their *“Everyone is doing it so I’m going to get mine”* attitude. While this is thoroughly dishonorable and shameful in the secular world, it is the worst of all tragedies in the spiritual realm. Our text puts the whole matter on that higher plane when it says, ***“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, ²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”***

As with all elements of the Christian’s life, our honor always goes back to Jesus Christ and our Christian faith. Christ not only demonstrated the highest conceivable form of honor, his perfect conduct actually won our salvation. His motto could well have been: *“Duty, honor, God.”* He regarded the will of God the Father as his sacred duty, and never once did he waver in his honorable fulfillment of that trust. Never once did he look around to see what others were doing – which was a good thing since everyone around him was thoroughly corrupt. He simply and humbly did what he knew had to be done to rescue sinners like us from the tormenting fires of eternity. Christ’s honorable service was the sacrifice that paid for our sins – the whole ugly mess. Believing that that is true, forgiveness – and therefore heaven – is ours.

Dear Christian use this knowledge as an aid daily to beat into submission that dishonorable old Adam within you, and to put on that new man every single morning until you are called home. That new man within you longs to walk honorably in perfect obedience and conformity to the will of our Savior God. Know that the world around you is profoundly corrupt; but know too that you have been called to by your God to rescue them from the wrath that most certainly awaits all who die as enemies of the Triune God. Call them out, rescue them, with both your words and your actions. This is good; this is right; this is honorable. So says our God. *Amen.*

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Isaiah 43:16-21** Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters, ¹⁷ Who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power (they shall lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick): ¹⁸ "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. ²¹ This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.

NKJ **Luke 20:9-19** Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. ¹⁰ "Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ "Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² "And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out. ¹³ "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' ¹⁴ "But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵ "So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ "He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it they said, "Certainly not!" ¹⁷ Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone'? ¹⁸ "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." ¹⁹ And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people -- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mr. Michael McEnroe, President Mrs. Eileen McEnroe, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Miss Suzannah Miller, Organist

The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 21, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#723- (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 43:16-21) Our first lesson must, as always, be read with faith and understanding. It speaks of "a new thing" that God will do for mankind. By the wisdom that can come only from God the Holy Spirit we understand that that "new thing" is Jesus Christ, and the full and free forgiveness of sins through faith in him. This forgiveness extends to all mankind.

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 51 (Brown Hymnal page 28)

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 20:9-19) Jesus here tells a parable to illustrate how the Jews had continually rejected the prophets, and would also reject Him as God's Son. Certainly we are not immune from such temptations and pray therefore that God would preserve us in the one true faith all our days. The dishonorable actions of others can never be allowed to draw us from the path of honorable obedience.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#158- (Red Hymnal)

"Glory Be to Jesus"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Timothy 2:22-26 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Honor"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -#792- (Brown Hymnal)

"Let All Things Now Living"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -783- (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus, Shepherd of the Sheep"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (60) 2010 Average (52) Wednesday (37)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-3:00 p.m.	– Handyside Baby Shower
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC – Pastor James Naumann is considering the call to Jamestown, ND. Pastor Joel Fleischer is considering the calls to Clarkston and Orofino. Fairchild, WI has called Pastor Timothy Wheaton of Lamar, CO.

CLC Histories Available – The CLC history books have been delivered. Please take your copy if you ordered one. One copy was purchased for the Church library and can be borrowed by members.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Church Council, together with the Pastor, attended the March 16 meeting. Treasurer Adams reported that strong February offerings helped to reduce our budget deficit by almost two-thirds. The Usher Manual, Cleaning Check List, and Education Fund Guidelines were all reviewed and updated. Copies are available. Keith Mantz and Melvin Sutheimer are this year's Audit Committee and have begun their work. Confirmation Sunday is scheduled for May 30. Full minutes are available from Sec. Ollenburger.

Delegates – We are looking for two delegates to represent St. Paul at the Jamestown Delegate Conference (May 25-27) and at the CLC Convention in Eau Claire (June 21-25).

ILC Visitors' Day – The annual ILC Visitors' Day is April 23. Please contact the Pastor if you are interested in attending.