

## INTRODUCTION TO SUNDAY'S MESSAGE

**A ritual - a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of actions performed according to a prescribed order**

**A practice - the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or ritual, as opposed to theories relating to it**

In this case the ritual is baptism – the practice is how we do this.

Jesus spoke of two rituals – remembering his death and an initiation for people who decided to follow Jesus. Of course being fallen people we've argued about how these rituals should be carried out and when in a person's life.

So remembering his death is done in a range of ways

- Names – the Mass, Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Breaking of Bread, the Eucharist.
- And is it a loaf, a piece of bread, a wafer or gluten free crackers and should it be celebrated with wine or grape juice or something that resembles them. And how often - daily, weekly, first Sunday morning and third Sunday evening or quarterly
- And do you have to have a priest or can anyone lead the ritual, the practice

Jesus made no statement about the concerns that have become ours.

He made it simple – this is my body, this is my blood, remember and proclaim.

Same with regard to Baptism – infant or believer, lots of water or a little; at the age of understanding or when God speaks

As a community we've made decisions over the decades, the centuries about how we should do this – we belong to a worldwide movement that can trace its roots right back to Jesus in terms of practice but also to the Reformation – where among all the things that were up for re-interpretation the place of baptism was one of them. Not everyone saw this and so when groups of Christians began affirming again the truth of believers' baptism many of them were drowned for such beliefs.

In terms of baptism we feel that it would be for people who freely decide in response to the Holy Spirit, that it would be done decently and that it would be seen both to mark a commitment to Jesus and also a part of the group of responses we call Christian initiation.

Beginning – but what comes after baptism? If it's a beginning point – what comes next?

## PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS TO TIMOTHY

I want to read you part of a letter that was written in a place called Macedonia way back in 65AD. It's a letter from Paul, who used to be called Saul and was responsible for killing Christians, to a young Christian called Timothy who Paul met while he was on his missionary journeys. Some people say Paul is the greatest missionary who has ever lived.

I'm going to read 1st Timothy, chapter 4. **The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup>They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be**

rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,<sup>5</sup> because it is consecrated **(made holy and acceptable)** by the word of God and prayer.

<sup>6</sup> If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters **(other Christians)**, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.<sup>8</sup> For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.<sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.<sup>10</sup> That is why we labour and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things.<sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.<sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup> Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.<sup>16</sup> Watch your life and doctrine **(set of beliefs)** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

At each stage of our lives it's good for us to have someone to learn from and someone to teach. Paul was like a mentor for Timothy. I find it interesting that mentoring has become extremely popular in secondary schools. It follows on from the buddy system that Presbyterian Support and Anglican Family Care have established for younger children. Due to family breakdown, more than any other factor, some young people go through their teenage years without having someone to look up to in their home. Schools and other community agencies have looked to fill that void by finding appropriate role models for teenagers to develop a relationship with. Schools are crying out for such people and Sian has spent a significant amount of time establishing a mentoring network at Queen's High School. If this is something you think you're able to do there won't be any difficulty in finding someone to mentor. In fact, there are even young people in our youth group who are looking for someone to act as a mentor for them.

I'm grateful for the time Wally Driver invested in me while I was doing the youth pastors' course many years ago and I really enjoy spending time with Harry Gilchrist who, I've observed, has remained faithful to God through the harshest experience life can throw at you, that of losing a much loved child. It's good for us to have a Paul in our lives and it's good for us to have a Timothy - someone to learn from and someone to teach.

In the first five verses of this chapter Paul is warning Timothy that he needs to reject some of the things he's heard because they're not helpful in his walk with Jesus and they're certainly not true. He doesn't hold back when he describes these people.

Paul's also warning Timothy to beware of people who major on minors. You know the kind of people he's talking about. One issue people who caught so caught up in policing the world for God that they miss the big picture.

That's why it's important to have a mentor to discuss things with. It's good to chew things over with someone who's been around for a while, someone who's spiritually mature and someone who can give us a wise perspective on things we're thinking through. It's good for us to have a Paul in our lives and it's good for us to have a Timothy - someone to learn from and someone to teach.

In the next five verses Paul talks about training yourself to be godly. Noah trains really hard for the cross country races he competes in and he runs to improve his stamina in football. In fact, he and Ella started running so fast this year that at times I took the car on their training runs because I could no longer keep up

with them. However, I want you to know that last time I took Noah on in 400m I crushed him. There's life in the old dog yet!

Volleyball is Hezekiah's passion and he trains hard during the season – he practices twice a week for his school team, Bayfield, and has another practice each week because he's in the Otago team.

Physical training is of some value, Paul says, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. You wouldn't leave home without having a shower (I hope) so Christians need to develop the same kind of habit with reading the Bible, praying, giving, fasting, serving, and asking for forgiveness. These are the ways we train ourselves to be godly and the character God develops in us prepares us for the life to come.

In the next five verses Paul encourages Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (the Bible), to preaching and to teaching. Sharing God's Word can have a powerful impact in our lives because when we share it with others we're forced to try to measure up so that our lives back up our words.

We're not told what gift Timothy has but Paul urges him to use it. Talents are things we are born with, and there are people here who can only be described as freaks because they have so many. You know who you are! Gifts, on the other hand, are the things God gives us through the Holy Spirit so that we can serve him in specific ways. Sometimes we discover our gifts and then we look for suitable ways to use them. At other times God calls us to a task we don't feel we're capable of and then he gives us the gifts we need to carry it out. Either way, God expects us to use the gifts and talents he has blessed us with.

Finally, Paul tells Timothy to watch his life and doctrine (set of beliefs) closely. I've been playing squash competitively for the last eight years and am always trying to improve my game. I do this by thinking about where I put my feet, the best places to hit the ball and the shots I need to practise to become a more consistent player.

Followers of Jesus need to give that kind of attention to the things they believe and the way they act and react. One of the saddest things to observe in life is someone who talks the talk but fails to walk the walk. It's easy to come up with a list of names of people in New Zealand who have been outspoken followers of Jesus but then let themselves and all of us down by not living up to the life they talk about. If we're to save both ourselves and people around us there has to be a consistency between the things we claim to believe and the way we live those beliefs out.

None of this is easy. At the end of significant sporting occasions, when the winning captain is being interviewed, he or she will almost always talk about the hard work that has gone into being successful. Following Jesus is no different. If we're to reach our full potential and become all God intended for us to be then it requires a lot of plain, hard work.

I'm not as good at squash as I would like to be, in fact, I got a hiding as recently as yesterday. But there's no comparison between the player I was eight years ago and the player I am now. When I began playing I had a ranking of 1490 points. I'm now up to 2395 and have even scaled the dizzying heights of C1 with 2440 points. It's taken a lot of time and a lot of practice but I'm a lot better than I was.

It should be the same for us as we look back on the progress we've made in our walk with Jesus. In verse 10 Paul says to Timothy, "That is why we labour and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe."

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus has made it possible for all people to have a relationship with the God who created them, but people are only saved when they put their trust in Jesus and spend the rest of their lives trying to please him. It's hard work. However, we should always keep in mind the prize that waits for those who remain faithful to the end – the benefits are out of this world!

