

BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

JULY 29, 2018

“JUST DO IT”

Youth Sunday

Text: 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Today is Youth Sunday and Noisy Can Sunday! It is a day, 4 times a year, when we, as a church demonstrate our commitment to our young people from the children on up to our college kids. We give them opportunities to lead in worship (throughout the year) but especially on these days. We offer scholarships to help them pursue their education. And it is a privilege for us to be involved in all of this.

(Read 1 Timothy 4:11-16)

The Scripture for today is addressed to us—young people. The Apostle Paul was writing to young Timothy. He wrote, ‘Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.’

Timothy was being criticized for being too young to be in leadership.

Now the context of these words, the reason the Apostle Paul wrote these lines to Timothy, was that Timothy was being criticized for his leadership. There wasn’t anything wrong with Timothy’s leadership per se, with the things the young man was doing as a leader. Rather, Timothy was being criticized for being too young to be a leader, --too young to hold the level of responsibility that a leader in the church finds himself or herself in. Now that wasn’t the only root of the problem.

Timothy’s teachings were at odds with his critics. But here, Timothy was taking flak for being too young to have the kinds of responsibilities he held in life.

And what was Timothy supposed to do about that? How was he supposed to handle this criticism? ‘Well, we learn to handle criticism in different ways. Sometimes we leave. Sometimes we go quiet. Sometimes we lash back in anger.’ But the Apostle Paul’s advice to Timothy as to how he should handle criticism was, ‘Don’t give those people any grounds for criticism’.

‘Set an example!’ Paul told them, ‘Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers!’ What comes to mind when you think of: Richard Nixon, Bill Cosby or Pete Rose? What kind of ‘example’ did those people set for us with their lives? What sort of example did they leave us? Paul tells young Timothy to ‘set an example.’”

But an example in what? Well, Paul here cites five areas where this young man, or any of us for that matter, might set an example with our lives. He lists: ‘speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.’ Two of them, speech and behavior, refer to our public life, what other people see about us. And three of them—love, faith and purity—they are more inner qualities. They have to do with our inner selves, the life of our spirit, our hearts. They are inner qualities. But our inner qualities, they have a way of coming out, manifesting themselves, in our public lives. People see them in our daily walk. So our spirits offer up examples. But Paul cites these five areas where young Timothy might ‘set an example’ to those around him: ‘speech, behavior, love, faith, and purity.’

1. Set an example in Speech

He begins by telling Timothy to, ‘set an example in speech’. And it is not surprising that speech is the first thing Paul mentions. Because, our speech has such an impact on the world around us! How do you feel when you’re criticized? Contrast that with how you feel when you’re honored! Our speech has a huge impact on the people around us! Paul reminds us first and foremost to, ‘Set an example with our speech’. And whether that be through tone of voice or the words we choose, we should, as Christians, ‘Set the world an example with our speech.’

2. Set an example in Behavior

Paul also tells us to ‘set an example...with our life.’ The word there in Greek is literally, ‘behavior’ or ‘conduct.’ We should ‘set an example with our conduct.’

A while back there was an incident at a Passion Play, in the scene where Jesus carries the cross. As the play was proceeding, a man in the audience started heckling the actor playing Jesus, with taunts and dares. At first the actor just ignored it. But the guy kept going on and on. Finally, the actor playing Jesus gets really mad and he blows up. He throws down his cross. He charges out into the audience. And he hauls off and punches the guy. The two were broken apart. And Jesus started apologizing profusely. But the director said to him, ‘Look, I don’t care if you’re the real Jesus! You ever pull a stunt like that again and you’re fired! The next night, the same heckler was back doing the same thing. At first, Jesus just

ignored it. But as the heckler kept going on and on, Jesus got madder and madder. He started trembling. Finally, the man playing Jesus throws down his cross and shouts at the heckler, “I’ll deal with you!—Right after the resurrection!”

We say we’re Christians. ‘Set an example in your behavior!’ The Christ in you is the only Christ a lot of people in this world are ever going to see! ‘Set an example in your behavior!’ People are watching: The way we treat others, how we act when we are wronged, the way we spend our time. ‘Set an example in your behavior!’ Be gentle and godly. ‘Set an example in your behavior!’

3. Set an example in Love

Paul also told Timothy, ‘Set an example in your love!’ This is easier with some folks than others. And like Jesus in that Passion Play it can be hard to love people who are openly criticizing us. But ‘set an example with your love’, Paul says.

A group of salesmen attended a convention in Chicago. They were rushing to catch their plane back home. And in their rush, one of the salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table that held a display of apples that this young woman was selling. Apples flew everywhere. But they were late. So without stopping or looking back, they all kept running and just managed to reach their plane in time for boarding. All but one! He felt guilty. He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his inner guilt, and told his buddies to go on without him. He’d catch the next flight. He returned to where the apples were all over the floor. And looking, he saw that the young woman selling the apples was blind! She was crying in frustration as she groped around the floor for her produce. In the busy terminal, the crowd was swirling about her. And no one had stopped to help her. The salesman said nothing as he knelt on the floor with her and helped her gather up the apples. He helped put them back on her display. As he did so, he noticed that several of them had become bruised. “Are you okay?” he asked. She nodded through the tears. And he pulled out his wallet and said, “Here, I’ll buy all these bruised one.” As the salesman started to walk away to catch the next flight, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “Mister...” He looked back. “Are you Jesus?” As he walked away to catch the next flight home that question kept bouncing about in his mind, “Are you Jesus?” The Christ in you is the only Christ a lot of people in this world will ever see! ‘Set an example with your love’ Paul writes.

4. Set an example in Faith

Paul also counseled Timothy to ‘set an example in faith’. Probably one of the greatest lies we churches tell ourselves is that, “young people are the church of

tomorrow.” We are the church of TODAY! YOU are the church of today! All of us together are the church! We are his witnesses in this world! With a lot of people you’re his only witness! Do other people know that Christ is first place in your life? Do they know that you live your life to honor Christ? ‘Set an example in faith’, Paul tells us.

5. Set an example in Purity

And then lastly, Paul concludes, ‘set an example in purity.’ The word here in the Greek is literally ‘chastity.’ Timothy was young. And Timothy was single. And Paul tells him, ‘Set an example in purity.’ What is Paul saying? Well, ‘purity’ means: if we’re single we wait for our intended partner, if we are married, we focus our desire on our spouse, and married or not, ‘purity’ means we don’t allow impure thought to control our minds. ‘Set an example in purity,’ Paul tells us. But now, the ‘purity’ referred to here is not just saying ‘no’ to relations at the wrong time and wrong place in life, although that’s a piece of it. The word there in the Greek is literally ‘chastity.’ But here the more general meaning of the word is intended, ‘purity.’ And that is the way most Bibles translate it. ‘Set an example in purity.’ And what exactly is that? Well, ‘Purity is the undiluted life: purity of action, purity of motives, purity of intentions. As they say, “Following Christ is more than simply quoting Scripture or going to church.” Christianity is a consecration of our hearts. Everyone makes mistakes. But on the deepest level, ‘purity’ in the Christian life is a consecration of our heart. It is an orientation of our lives. We all make mistakes. But ‘purity’ in the Christian life is the giving of our hearts, to Christ, and to Christ alone. The Apostle Paul wrote us, “Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.’

Don’t let the world look down on you because you are young. But set an example with your whole life—all of who you are—let it be an example for the world to follow. After all, you are the hands and feet of Jesus Christ!

AMEN!