

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 15, 2018

1 Timothy 3:1-7

1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

What was the first job that you ever had? For me it was a paper route. Twice a week I would deliver the local free shopper and newspaper to all the houses in our neighborhood. It was not a job that took a lot of skill or expertise—to individually bag up all the newspapers and deliver them on time. There was no exhaustive interview process or intensive on the job training required. The same was true of my next job with more regular hours at the public library. The basic job description could be summarized with two words: shelve books. The skills required included knowing your alphabet and numbers to get the books put back in the right order on the shelf. Of course this is often true of most first time or entry level jobs—easy tasks, minimal training, no experience required. A store or business will post a “help wanted” sign in the window and anyone off the street can get the job. Of course this process does not work for all jobs and positions. Many require extensive training and schooling with specific skills and abilities from the applicants. The same is true with the church and its pastors. Not many churches are going to post “help wanted” signs and take the first person that walks in off the street, no questions asked. As we look at Paul's words to Timothy this morning/evening and consider the role of the pastor, we will look at both the description of the position as well as the qualifications for the position.

When it comes to the position of a pastor, the description of that position is kept fairly simple in verse 1: “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.” The first detail we see here is that the position is called “overseer.” The term is episkopos, from which comes our word episcopal. Another meaning for this word is bishop. The other term often used in the New Testament for this position is elder or presbyter. Both are used interchangeably and would be the closest to what we call our pastors today. The meaning of overseer is straightforward—to help oversee the work of the church. The second detail is that is work is called “a noble task,” literally a good work or even beautiful work. That meaning of beautiful calls to mind Paul's quote of Isaiah in Romans 10(:15): “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.” That is the essence of being a pastor—overseeing the work of bringing the good news about Jesus to others.

Notice that there is nothing more specific here for the job description of a pastor. There is no comprehensive list of everything that a pastor may do in serving a congregation. Different pastors in different congregations will have different duties. But that's because everything finally goes back to the gospel. Whether preaching or teaching or visiting or counseling or stewardship or outreach or discipleship or anything else, everything centers on that noble task, that beautiful work of sharing the gospel.

While the work of the pastor is noble and good and beautiful, it is not always easy. Sharing God's Word means sharing both law and gospel and working with sinful human beings and their sinful lives. Sometimes, like the prophet Amos in our first lesson (Amos 7:10-17), it may mean bringing a message that no one wants to hear. Sometimes, as Jesus warned the disciples in our gospel lesson (Mark 6:7-13), it may mean moving on from those who reject the message. But that is not always the reaction to this work. And so it is good and beautiful when we see the Holy Spirit take that gospel message and change someone's heart, bringing them to believe in Jesus as their one and only Savior.

Verse 1 also has something to say when it comes to the recruitment of pastors: "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer." Desiring and aspiring to serve in the ministry is a good thing, there is always a great need for pastors. Such a desire can only come from faith—seeing the need for the gospel in our world and wanting to help share that message. That desire may be different at times. Some will have it already as young boys, some will grow into it through the years of college and seminary training, some will come to it later in life. We want to encourage that desire but also not force it or guilt someone into serving, it still must be one's own desire. While this is a noble task, we know that we can serve God in whatever vocation we choose. So when it comes to recruitment we will continue to encourage possible candidates as well as offer prayers to God that more and more men set their hearts on this noble task.

The rest of the verses of our sermon text deal with the qualifications to serve as an overseer or pastor. While these words are primarily addressed to pastors and their positions, there is also value for all of us to study these words. Almost all of these qualifications apply to every Christian and how we live our lives in service to our God.

Verse 2 starts: "Now the overseer must be above reproach." This first qualification really serves as a summary for all that follows. The pastor serves as God's messenger to his people. He also serves as an example of Christian living to those around him. This does not mean that the pastor has to be perfect; pastors are sinful human beings too. And yet the pastor would not want to do anything that would discredit his ministry or take away from the authority of God's message. If a pastor does stumble or fall in one of these areas, it does not mean that there is no forgiveness for these sins. But it does mean that the pastor may have to leave the ministry so as not to be a stumbling block and stand in the way of the gospel being shared. For all of us as Christians, being above reproach reminds us that we too represent Christ in our lives. If any of us are stumbling in these areas, we too can take away from the message that Christ wants us to share.

Verse 2 continues with one that is fairly straightforward: "the husband of but one wife." In a world where the sixth commandment is being stretched and twisted to fit all kinds of sins, modeling a faithful Christian marriage is important for all of those whom God has blessed with a spouse. The next three tie together: "temperate, self-controlled, respectable." Temperate is sober-minded, not being intoxicated by everything that is new or different. Self-controlled is prudent and thoughtful, thinking before acting. Respectable is conducting oneself in an orderly manner. If one is lacking in these areas it may cause a lack of confidence in their ability to oversee and lead. Next is "hospitable." The gospel is for all people and so one should be kind and welcoming to all, friend and stranger alike. "Able to teach" is one quality that does not necessarily apply to all Christians, not everyone has that gift. But the ability to learn first and then communicate clearly is needed for any messenger of the gospel.

Verse 3 continues with "not given to drunkenness," literally "not alongside wine." While there is nothing wrong with an occasional drink, having alcohol as a constant companion is never

good for any situation in life. “Not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.” One who is attacking, one who is arguing to always get their way does nothing to advance the cause of the gospel. A gentle hand is preferred, willing to compromise except when it comes to what God’s Word says. “Not a lover of money.” Like alcohol and anything else, whether it reaches the level of addiction or not, putting anything first in place of God does not help the work of the gospel.

Verses 4 & 5 go together: “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)” Just as in marriage, modeling good parenting is needed. This also includes putting in the time to raise one’s children, not leaving it up to someone else. Verse 6: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.” Time to mature in one’s faith and life is needed to help oversee others. The warning here is against a pride where one’s position may go to their head, as the devil found out when he thought he could rebel against God.

Verse 7 circles back to the start: “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.” Being above reproach, having a good reputation is not just about the congregation or fellow Christians. It is also for those outside the church, whom we would hope to reach out to with the gospel. If that reputation is damaged it is all the easier for the devil to continue his work of keeping people as unbelievers.

With all of the qualifications listed, we note that they center more on qualities of character and faithfulness. Different pastors will have different skills and abilities and interests. But above all we want our pastors to be above reproach as they work to oversee this noble task of sharing the gospel. When it comes to looking for its pastor, a congregation will do more than used “help wanted” signs to bring in anyone off the street. We are blessed with our worker training system that produces our future pastors and not only trains them over the years of college and seminary with the skills in language and preaching and teaching that they need, but more importantly works to find and mold men to meet these qualifications and who are ready to serve in God’s church. There will always be a need for more pastors. So we encourage those possible candidates we know and we pray that the Lord may bring more to serve in this noble task. Amen.