

# It's Terrible. But Is It Serious?

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2 Timothy 1:1-14

Sunday, October 2, 2010

It's Sunday. It's a beautiful, crisp autumn day outside. Here inside the church we have fellowship and that very special invitation from Jesus we call communion. It's really lovely to be here this morning in the faith with you.

Friday was a little different, wasn't it? Do you remember Friday? It rained, you may remember. And rained. And then rained some more. It felt as though I had woken up on Friday morning not in the crisp New England days of autumn, but in the faraway tropics somewhere. The traffic, you may remember, was stalled everywhere by puddles the size of small lakes. Shortly after I arrived at the church, a line of people began to form outside the back door in the outer hallway. It was 9:15 am and homeless people with no dry shelter to go to were waiting for the Loaves and Fishes lunch to begin at noon.

I was in a cranky mood by the time I arrived at the church. It wasn't just the rain. My computer was down and my Blackberry doesn't like humid weather. The touch screen of the Blackberry gets temperamental on tropical days. So I was having a conversation with my technology on Friday morning, and not a happy one. I like being in control of my life and I don't like being reminded by a machine that I am not in control! So I was feeling out of sorts.

Feeling that way, that is, until I made my way over toward the church and acknowledged the life that many of us lead in the city on good days and bad. Those who have no home to lock the door on. Those with no car in the parking

lot. Those without a car they can depend on. Those with no job to go to. Those with no dry place to wait in. Those who have to look for lunch where it is made available rather than where I might like to find it. As I thought about what I saw, I realized how rich and protected my life really is, and I saw again what it takes for many people just to get through the hours of the day.

This is *not* a sermon about being grateful for what I have. On Friday I was reminded that my opinion of the weather and my troubles with technology are pretty small stuff. I *am* grateful for shelter and reliable transportation and employment. I don't take them for granted! But I became aware of another invitation in the day. It's in the text this morning. Paul says that compared to the treasure he has in Christ Jesus, it's *all* small stuff: prison, isolation, illness, condemnation, loss of familiar faces and voices. Paul has been entrusted with something precious to be lived and declared and celebrated at *all* times, not just the safe and comfortable times. He says this amazing thing: *The one I trust, he says, can take care of what he's trusted me to do – right to the end.* Imagine with me for a moment that there is a trust so simple that it can be applied to absolutely everything in our lives!

Let me draw a picture for you. Imagine with me for a moment a horizontal dimension to our lives. If you wish to follow me on this, hold up your arms like this. Along my arms are everything I think, feel and do from day to day. From coffee in the morning to work, weather, love, death and taxes, it's all here. I have, as you probably also do, some very strong opinions about what happens along my arms and this horizontal dimension! Some days – the good days! – it's all flowing and I feel like I can carry the world if asked! Have you ever had a day like that? I admit that as I get older, I get humbler and those days get fewer and fewer! And there are days when it's all I can do to hold my own arms up. And some days when I can't even do that. Is this also true for you?

Here's what Paul is trying to get us to see. There's another dimension. If you wish, you can stand up with your arms at your sides and take a deep breath. Breathe easily for a moment. Notice that there is a different energy that flows vertically, this way. Notice that there is an energy below your feet that you are standing on. Notice that there is an energy above your head that wants to wash down through you..... Notice whether this energy feels familiar or perhaps not so familiar.

If you are standing, you can be seated. And if you are feeling a little foolish here in church, don't. You are just being reminded that our "faith" doesn't exist just in a book, but in space and time!

Here's the message for this morning. We spend the vast majority of our time holding up the arms of our lives! Moreover, we judge our own value on how well we hold it all up! And how's that working for us???? We almost entirely overlook the fact that we have another dimension – a dimension that extends far below our feet and far above our heads – a dimension that carries energy and light and strength – a dimension that has been entrusted to us to use for our living – the dimension that makes holding up our arms doable and even joyful – the dimension that tells us that everything we are trying to hold up with our arms is, when all is said and done, small stuff!

I don't wish to dismiss this morning the struggle or pain or fear or emptiness that comes from time to time. I simply invite us all to remember that that is not all we have. We are invited to remember that we have a God whose light and energy and strength are always available to us. We have Jesus whose life shows us how to apply that light and energy and strength to the horizontal dimension we call our lives.

Once upon a time I came across a tag line that stuck with me. I really didn't understand it at the time, but it stuck and now I am beginning to get it. As life comes at us along this horizontal dimension, we're invited to notice this way: *It's terrible. But is it serious?* What comes along the horizontal dimension is often hard, not least because we see it that way! But what is terrible is *serious* only so long as we ignore the vertical dimension. When we remember the vertical, we get access to the energies we call love, forgiveness, fearlessness, peace.

When Jesus invited his disciples to come to his table on that very night in which he would be betrayed, and then arrested, he invited them to look at the terrible and see that even the terrible is cared for. He said that *in his body* they would find *healing*, and *in his blood* they would find *fearlessness*. Among the disciples, in the practice of bread and cup, they would always find what they most longed for!

So you and I are invited this morning to practice *healing* and *fearlessness* as we come to the table of the Lord's Supper. We come to be reminded that the terrible is cared for. We come to taste the goodness of another dimension. We come to put back together the horizontal of our days with the vertical of God's love. We come to see our seriousness met with God's joy!

And then, after communion, when we are invited to get up and greet one another with *Christ's peace*, know that we are doing something critically important. It's more than a handshake, a greeting, a hug. We are declaring who we are! We are the people who have learned at this table – in the light of God's love and Jesus' life – that *it may be terrible, but it's not serious!* Amen