

17th Sunday after Pentecost

2 Timothy 1:1–14

¹⁴ *Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*

When something is precious, it is worth protecting.

Remember the extraordinary lengths to which some Hollywood celebrities go in order to protect their property and families. The comedian Jim Carey has a house full of surveillance equipment. He has automatic fences that spring up out of the ground at the first sign of trouble.

Visitors to Madonna's home have to negotiate four separate security checkpoints. Each of them is equipped with surveillance cameras and metal detectors.

It sounds weird. But if something or someone is special to you, they're worth protecting.

All through Paul's last letter he shows again and again what's the most important thing for him. What's so important and so valuable that it must be protected. And he's writing to Timothy and so to us to say how essential it is for ministers and the rest of God's people to protect it in our day.

As he himself shelters in prison, he knows his death is near.

What's his message for Timothy and all God's people down the centuries? It's there in chapter 1 verse 14 "*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us*".

This "good deposit" is the message about Jesus – the Christian message. It's a banking word, this deposit. But it's not money he's talking about. You can sum it up in 3 words in English: **Jesus is Lord.**

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That is, by his life, death and resurrection Jesus of Nazareth is the only true ruler of this world. He made everything in it and everything else that exists. He is boss of everything in it and everything else that exists. That includes, especially, all human beings.

So, the “good deposit” calls for a response once we human beings hear it. Everyone needs to become his follower.

And it is this message that Timothy – and we – are to safeguard, protect. But – why?

Paul spells out some of the answers:

I. In the “Letterhead” Paul reminds Timothy of “the promise that brings life in Christ Jesus” (1:1).

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,.....

Here’s a reminder. The message that Jesus is Lord is from God himself and for those who accept it they are brought to life. Sounds a bit odd, doesn’t it? And yet – remember both Jesus and Paul talk about those who don’t have Jesus as their boss as being dead as far as God is concerned. They have no relationship to God. It’s as if they are dead in his sight. Spiritually dead, even though physically alive. BUT in Jesus is the certain promise of life. If you turn to Jesus you are brought from death to life. God now treats you not as a lost cause but as his living and dear child. And so, such a life-changing message – literally life-giving – is precious and needs to be protected from being changed.

Why?

We read on.

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Paul reminds us this is a new life of trusting God – not ourselves.

He says:

⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Timothy saw each day of his life what it meant to now be alive to God, to be God's adopted child, and so to trust him and not yourself. To live God's way, not his own way.

How blessed are we if we have a Mum or Dad, a Grandma or Grandpa who follow Jesus. How blessed are we if we can be a spiritual Mum or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa to a younger believer and show them what faith means. How the life-giving message that Jesus is Lord can be turned into a changed life of selflessness, not self-centredness.

Sadly, Christian history is full of people who have used the message of Jesus as a means to profit themselves.

That is why the truth that living for Jesus means not living for ourselves needs to be protected. Needs to be guarded.

And he goes on to make two further points:

Firstly, that this life as a child of God is a free gift of God in Christ Jesus.

Listen to this in verses 9 to 10:

⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

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Thank God that God's kindness to us is "*not because of anything we have done*". It's not based on our religious actions, our good deeds or anything else we do.

We can never hear enough of this, can we?

We rejoice there is such a thing as a free lunch!

Because Jesus paid for our new life in full! We do not deserve it. We cannot do anything to get it. As we are reminded each week: his death on our behalf was a "full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world".

The gospel message is about "done!" not "do!"

Our new life as God's children is God's free gift to us in Jesus Christ.

THAT needs to be protected from any attempt to make it depend on what we do.

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And then, as if there have not been enough surprises, he says:

That life is a life of suffering!! Listen to verses 11 and 12:

¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

None of us like pain. What's hard is that sometimes telling others or bringing others to hear of Jesus gets a very negative reaction. For Paul, it meant being chucked in jail from which he would never return.

For millions of our brothers and sisters in the faith it has meant and does now mean being outcasts from family.

Becoming outcasts from community.

Being watched 24 hours a day.

Being physically attacked.

Losing one's job, being kidnapped, being thrown in jail, even being killed.

And all because you now live a new life with Jesus as your boss.

Yet – all would say, with Paul – *“I am not ashamed because I now know God. He will guard me and guide me to the end. Knowing him is far better than anything”.*

It's a bit of a challenge, isn't it?

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Are we so convinced that Jesus is boss of all that we are willing to be treated like our boss was treated? Because that's what will happen.

As Jesus said: "In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer – I have overcome the world."

Or as Paul says: "All those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

That's part of what has to be protected – that a new life in Christ will be a life in part marked by suffering because of belonging to Christ.

So, my friends,

¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.