

**2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18****Twenty-second Sunday Morning After Pentecost, October 31, 2004****Reformation Sunday**

Last Sunday there were three words that titled the sermon. This Sunday there are two words, stated three times, that title the sermon. "I have. I have. I have."

I told you last Lord's Day that I was blessed to go to The Varsity on Saturday for an intake of grease to offset all that I'm doing to keep my cholesterol in check. I stood in line forever and as I did I was reminded of the lingo behind the counter that I tend to forget until I go back the next time, which isn't especially often. Remember what those hard-working folk ask you? "What'd ya have?" I tried to pay attention and if I'm not mistaken, it was said rapidly three times: "What'd ya have? What'd ya have? What'd ya have?" Hey. Our friends at The Varsity are into threes as well. As I listened to the "What'd ya have?", my mind shifted to the threes of the text here in 2 Timothy 4.

Three times, in this text before us, Paul declared, "***I have.***" It is a triad of confidence. It is a confidence in the future because of what's been done in the past. It's a trio that asserts encouragement to someone else. In its context, that encouragement was directed toward Timothy. Life was not easy in Ephesus where he served. Pastoring those Ephesian house churches was no small task and from time-to-time, Timothy found himself discouraged.

In these verses that form sort of a "Last Will and Testament" of Paul, the much-loved Apostle offered an encouragement to someone discouraged. Some think these are Paul's final words ever written since in a short while he would be executed in Rome where he was a prisoner of the Emperor, Nero. For Timothy's sake, and ours mind you, he needed to express a spiritual legacy and a confidence as he anticipated a glorious future with the Risen Christ. His words are not a mere recitation of what he has accomplished, but they are words of encouragement to a pastor in a difficult situation. They are words calling Timothy to be resolute. I have. I have. I have.

John Chrysostom is one of our spiritual ancestors who was a pastor in Antioch and later in Constantinople, which is modern day Istanbul, Turkey, in the late Fourth Century and the initial years of the Fifth Century. Brother John died in AD 407. He once said of this text in 2 Timothy in a sermon he preached that Paul was eager to relieve the misery of his disciple, and therefore encourage him to be of good courage, since he, Paul, was going to his eternal reward, having finished his work, he had now obtained a glorious end. The same would be true of Timothy.

The same would be true of John Chrysostom and you and me. I have! I have! I have! It's a word about exerting effort in the contest between good and evil. "I have fought the good fight." It's a word about completing the journey with integrity. "I have finished the race." It's a word about maintaining commitment to the affirmation that Jesus is Lord. "I have kept the faith."

Most people I know earnestly desire to exert effort in the contest between good and evil. Most want to complete the journey of faith with integrity. Most want to maintain commitment to the reality that Jesus Christ really is Savior of the world and Lord of life.

The biblical analysis is clear. It really is a contest between good and evil. The very name of this day suggests that. Halloween, or more appropriately, "All Hallows' Eve," the day before "All Saints Day." All Saints' Day, November 1, has been celebrated since the ninth century in various faith traditions to acknowledge God and all His saints known and unknown. The day before, Halloween, has been viewed as a ghastly day, associated with death and evil.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not against trick-or-treating. I'm not against dressing up in appropriate costumes and having fun. I'm merely making the observation that Halloween ought to be a reminder to Christians that our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but with supernatural evil powers that manifest themselves in so many ways: hatred of other people; the exploitation of the poor and the rich;

the decadence of culture; the misplacing of our moral moorings. Evil may well be lurking in your life and mine. Don't believe it? Listen to what Paul told Timothy earlier in 3:1-5, a text which I'm going to utilize next Sunday.

***“You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!”*** Does anybody come to your minds when you hear those “distressing times” descriptions? How about you and me?

The contest between good and evil manifests itself even in the church. My fascination level is constantly on the rise. I just don't understand why Christians lack faith, discipline, and consistency especially when it comes to being the visibly gathered people of God. When it comes to completing the journey with integrity, a good many of us miss the mark. That is why we are to pay particular attention to the fact that today, All Hallows' Eve, is also the Lord's Day. Every Lord's Day is a reminder that we are a people or we're supposed to be a people who are ***“being poured out as a libation” (v. 6)***. Our lives are poured out in service every day and we celebrate that “pouring out” in corporate worship and corporate study every Lord's Day. We do? Yes we do.

Perhaps it is no accident in 2004 that this particular Lord's Day is All Hallows' Eve and Reformation Sunday. OK there's a lot of history in the sermon today. Work with me! It's important to the three I have. 487 years ago today, October 31, 1517, a Saxon Monk walked down the street to the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, and nailed on the front door 95 reasons why the church was dead and filled with evil and needed to be reformed for good. Some extra effort needed to be exerted in the contest between good and evil and it looked as if there was more evil than good in the church. So Martin Luther set off the greatest Reformation of church since her founding by the Lord Jesus Christ, which gave birth eventually, believe it or not, to folks like you and me who could express and live our Christian faith with a vision that was Baptist.

Martin Luther's desire was to call the church to journey with integrity by maintaining a commitment to Jesus Christ. His desire was motivated by a saintliness, which was terribly lacking. People of Firstfruits Living and Giving are to exert effort in the contest between good and evil being motivated to complete the journey with integrity by maintaining commitment to Christ. I have. I have. I have. To do that calls for saintliness. Saints are what we need more of today.

Samuel Wells, in a recent book, Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics, declares that Christians are called to be saints, not heroes. He distinguishes between heroes and saints. Heroes are the center of stories told about them, whereas saints are part of a story in which God is the center. A hero is willing to sacrifice him or herself – perhaps even give one's life in death – for some cause, whereas the saints rest assured that Christ has already gained the greater good through His death and resurrection. The icon of heroism is the soldier, for the saint it is the martyr. A hero cannot fail, lest some great calamity occur, but the saint expects to fail and knows that repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration are needed. Finally, by their heroic actions, heroes stand out from the rest of society, whereas saints depend upon their brothers and sisters in the faith community. All of the 64 New Testament references to saints are plural. Saints are never alone.<sup>1</sup> It's true. We're never alone and I'm not merely talking about “me and Jesus.” I'm referring to “us and Jesus” or more properly, “Jesus and us.”

We have one another. I have you. You have me. We have. It is much easier to do with each other than to do without each other. Last Sunday afternoon I ran in that race called A Step At A Time. It's a fundraiser for the Carroll County Emergency Shelter. You could do either a 5K or 10K. If you want to do the 10K, you just run it twice. There is something about running with a pack of people. When that race started there were, what 75 or 100, who were running together. There's energy in a crowd of people. I began to pick up my pace after the first mile. I could see people far ahead of me and I knew there were people behind me that I had passed. Turning right on Stewart Street off of North Lakeshore Drive, began the challenge. That's a steady incline all the way to Northside Drive. I saw folks in front of

me. I passed a few. Folks were still behind me. I completed the 5K and made the loop around the finish to start the second 5K. Not too many souls braved that one. I'm not sure why I did other than the fact that it was there. I think maybe there were about 35 of us. I passed someone before the four-mile mark and didn't see anybody in front of me. I knew they were there, though. When I turned right onto Stewart Street I might as well have been running up Mt. Everest. That steady incline was wearing me out. Still there was nobody in sight. Just before you get to Northside Drive, it levels off, and then dips down briefly before a killer incline requires every mental corridor to open up and convince you that you can do this. I mean the thoughts were driving me insane.

I heard words going through my mind like, "Jimmy you're dumb for running the 10K. You should have been smart like Jim Shadinger and just run the 5K or even smarter like your friend Steve Davis, who didn't run! Your body is killing you. Your legs are hurting. Your breathing is getting deeper and deeper. Sweat is pouring off your brow. Your eyes are burning. Look at those girls from that sorority at UWG – laughing, probably at you, drinking cool water, and having a good time. Look at that policeman up there keeping traffic at bay so you can do this. Look at him looking at you. He's probably thinking, 'Man that guy in that red cap is an idiot.' If you make it to him, ask him to pull out his gun and shoot you because you're an idiot." All those things were going through my mind in less than 60 seconds. I was alone. Nobody was in sight – in front of me or behind me. I know you're not supposed to look back, but curiosity got the best of me. It didn't make any difference. I couldn't see anybody and didn't have to worry about anybody catching up with me unless I just quit.

But I also heard other words in my mind. "This is hard. You can do it, though. It won't be long. You can do this. Even though you can't see anybody, they are out there. Some have finished. Some are nearing the finish. Some are behind you. You're on your way. Those sorority gals and that cop, they think all of you are idiots. All of you are in this together. Don't try to be a hero. Just maintain. Keep your pace. Hey, you're almost to the top of the hill. Push. Push a bit more. Just a step or two more and you're home free. Get a cup of water from that sorority girl and listen to her say, 'Good job. You can do it.' Listen to the officer say, 'Hang in there.' See they don't think you're an idiot." And the next thing I knew, I was heading down Northside Drive and I saw people in front of me. I wasn't going to catch anybody and didn't want to catch anybody. I was just glad to see some folks. And I finished in 11<sup>th</sup> in a time of 48:21. I stood and watched others who had finished and I stood and watched those who were behind me finish, too. I fought the good fight of the run. I finished the race. I kept faith with training. It paid off. I have! I have! I have!

Oh, if all of us in the church will say, in unison, "*I Have! I Have! I Have!*" we'll be encouraging each other and even those we do not know to a lifetime of confidence. We, like Paul, are to fight the good fight so we can say in the end, "The good fight I have fought." We, like Paul, are to look to finishing the race so we can say in the end, "The race I have finished." And like Paul, we are to keep the faith so we can say in the end, "The faith I have kept."

So, what have you?

**Sermon by Dr. Jimmy Gentry, Pastor  
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**All scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are from The New Revised Standard Version, 1989.**

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<sup>1</sup> "Century Marks" in The Christian Century 121 (September 21, 2004) 19, p. 6.