

Third Sunday after Trinity
1 Timothy 1, 12-17

I, Paul, thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. 13Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

15Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. 17Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Drear sisters and brothers,

“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” - do you know this word? According to Wikipedia it is the most well-known English word with more than 28 characters, known not only in England, but globally.

Mary Poppins is asked by a reporter: “I suppose there are no words to describe how you feel?!” upon which she replies: Of course there is! And then she starts singing the well known Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious-song.

I must admit that this word does not feature in 1 Timothy, nor any where else in the Bible. It is a creation that was started by Mary Poppins.

Interestingly however, 1 Timothy 1,14 does something similar. A word is created to describe something for which no word actually exists. There, and only there in the whole Bible, do we find the word: “hyperepleonasen” ὑπερπλέονασεν - almost as difficult to pronounce as the one of Mary Poppins. Literally translated it means: “exceedingly abundant”

It would not amaze me if, had 1 Timothy been written in the 1970’s, “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” would have been used. Or a much shorter word that we all know: WOW!

But what is this WOW about? It is because God chose a hopeless case - the biggest, meanest, most dedicated enemy of the Church, turns him around and

changes him into the most influential missionary of that same Church. Wow! Had God trampled him into the ground, devoured him with lightning from heaven, it would have been understandable. But this transformation - that is simply WOW! It would be as drastic as an Adolf Hitler turning into a Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or a Zuma into a male mother Theresa.

The blasphemer, persecutor, violent man, turns into a preacher of the Good News about Jesus Christ!

How did it happen? Well, it was this supercalifragilisticexpialidocious grace of God that achieved it! Wow! When last did I express such admiration, such utter amazement when speaking about God’s grace? Somehow I have become used to it, even take it for granted. But Paul never got over it. And the same applied to those who knew Paul well, and who worked with him. Time and again, when they saw his dedication, they were amazed at this transformation, and must have wondered what would have been if this amazing grace had not existed? And because this grace was so amazing, a new word was created to try to express it!

Today I want to take you on a journey of amazement - hoping that you too will again say “WOW”, wow about this Lord that we are serving.

1. WOW - I am redeemed!

Paul never stopped being amazed about his salvation, about the fact that God saved him, him of all people!

This amazement prevented him becoming self-righteous and arrogant - something that so easily happens to pious people. The gospel reading of today from Luke 15, 1-7 addresses this “spiritual arrogance” when we are told how the pious people are upset about Jesus because he mingles with those that do not deserve it, the people they despise.

To be honest, I sometimes succumb to this same arrogance when I speak about people that have messed up their lives - be it through corruption, laziness or evil actions.

This text however reminds me that I too have been redeemed purely out of grace, amazing grace. It is by no means true that I was a prime candidate because of being good, and therefore deserved this grace. The grace of God was exceedingly abundant in my own life as well.

WOW - I am redeemed, because Christ did not turn his face from me when I was despicable. Wow - I am set free, because Christ also thought of me when he died on the cross, when he prayed: Father, forgive them! WOW - he

was thinking of me as well when he said: it is finished!

2. WOW - I am a blessing!

Saul, the most aggressive and destructive enemy of the Church became the most influential apostle - even more influential than Peter himself!

Jesus knew that by transforming this despicable character, it would say more than a thousand words!

The gospel needs to be proclaimed with words. But the greatest blessing, the biggest impact comes through the life of Christians. When we live out the grace that we have received, we are Gospel in a visible form!

What I find fascinating is that the past of Paul is neither played down, nor excused. (I must admit that verse 13 could sound like an excuse: “I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief”. Again, it is difficult to translate this properly. Paul does not say that his actions were excusable, because done in ignorance and unbelief. Rather, the “before and after” are played up against each other in verse 13 and 14. Although Saul was highly educated and pious, his actions, retrospectively turned out to be ignorant and void of all faith. Verse 14 then states that after receiving this amazing grace his life was driven by faith and love)

And so Paul realized: WOW, I am a blessing - despite everything! I am a blessing, because the grace of God became visible through me!

This lets me reflect on my own life. My good deeds, my positive characteristics are a blessing. But my biggest failures, my most tragic wrong decisions and actions can also become a blessing, can even become a bigger blessing when they are exposed in the light of the gospel, when I can confess to them, receive forgiveness and start afresh.

Currently our news papers are full of reports on investigations and revelations of the wrong doings of politicians and business people. “We all have our little skeletons in the cupboard” one minister said in self-defence. And each one is hoping that their own skeletons will not be discovered.

In the case of Paul it is not about a skeleton in the closet - it is almost like a giant store room filled with skeletons. He does not try to cover up, rather he is deeply saddened and is bemoaning these actions. But he also realises: The fact that God did not destroy me, did not push me aside, shows how amazing his transforming grace is!

What do I learn from this? When we are honest about our failures, when we

confess to our wrong doings, admit to our mistakes, we become credible witnesses.

We all have our mistakes - that we know. But this should not become an excuse to continue making mistakes. Rather we should acknowledge the gravity of our mistakes, and stand amazed that we are accepted by Christ despite of these. I am allowed to be a Christian, to start afresh, to leave the old behind and become a living witness to Christ, a blessing for the people around me. WOW!

And this leads me to the next WOW:

3. WOW - God is great!

Whereas verse 14 used a new word creation to describe the amazing grace of God, verse 17 then comes with a Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious praise to God. “King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, to be praised for ever and ever!” The combination of phrases shows that words will never be enough to fully express the glory, beauty, nature of God. God is amazing! Although we cannot prove him, because he is invisible, he is there! Although we do not always experience him, he is all-present - every where and at all times. He is the only God, King eternal!

WOW - God leaves us amazed. WOW - he is a Lord that we can worship and adore. WOW - our words, songs, music, works of art will never, never fully show his glory. He is simply “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious”

Dear sisters and brother, dear losers, cowards, Jesus Christ reaches out to you. He looks at you and says: You can start afresh. Yes, you should be ashamed about everything that you messed up. But now, stand up and live, because I am there. Go, live and love, because I am leading you! Join in the praise of this wonderful God: Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun!

Yes, let us praise our Lord. He is indeed Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!

Amen

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