**Sermon 9/1/19**

**2st Timothy 1:3-7, 1:12-17, 2:1-7, & 4:6-13**

An elderly grandmother in Texas some years ago had recently lost her husband.

She often mentioned to her son how nervous she felt when she was all alone.

Her son bought a gun for her so she could protect herself.

He taught her how to load the gun, and how to shoot it.

He took her to a firing range so she could practice a little.

One day, after she did her shopping she returned to her car and

          found four young men seated inside.

She pushed her shopping cart aside, and drew her handgun out of her purse.

Pointing her gun at them she began to scream at them as loud as she could

          that she had a gun, and knew how to use it: so get out of the car.

The four doors of the car flew open, and the four men tumbled out of the car,

          and ran as fast as they could in four different directions.

Shaking a bit from the experience, the woman proceeded to load her shopping bags

          into the back of the car and quickly got into the driver's seat.

She put her key into the ignition, well, she tried to put the key into the ignition,

          but it wouldn't fit.

Shocked, she glanced around the car, and realized the letters she was going

          to drop off at the Post Office were no longer sitting in her front seat.

A little dangly thing, which she didn't have, was hanging from the rearview mirror.

Wondering what was going on, she looked around the parking lot.

And there, across the aisle and four cars down, was her car.

Quickly, she tossed her shopping bags into her own car.

Then she drove to the police station.

The sergeant to whom she told the story nearly doubled over in laughter.

Unable to speak, he simply pointed to the other end of the counter,

          where four frightened young men were reporting

          a carjacking by a crazy old woman with a gun.

We all make mistakes.             Some are more serious than others.

The congregation in Ephesus were making some mistakes, and Paul was

          very concerned about the problems their mistakes were causing.

Ephesus was a city filled with idol worship, sexual immorality, and false teachings.

Paul was in prison and could not go himself to Ephesus.

To insure that his work would continue, Paul turned more and more

          to a few loyal friends, especially Timothy and Titus.

He wrote them explicit instructions in the three letters,

          known collectively as "The Pastoral Letters".

He had left Timothy in Ephesus

          to teach the people not to follow false doctrines,

         or devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies,

         or promote controversial speculations,

         instead of advancing God's work in faith.

Timothy was young, and the tension in the church had him to the point of giving up.

So Paul wrote to Timothy to encourage him

          to keep teaching the true gospel as Paul himself had taught.

He urged Timothy to show the congregation the mistakes they were making,

          and the problems their mistakes were causing.

Some of the people in the early church with the same problems and challenges

          with money that we have today.

Some were leaders in the church, actually teaching

          that the Gospel of Jesus is a way to get rich.

Paul warned Timothy that money is like a trap,

          and a godly person must not be caught in it.

He told Timothy how dangerous false teachers could be.

They weren't just having trouble with their doctrine,

         they were adjusting the truths of God to match their own agenda,

         they were interfering with the faith of the church.

The congregation in Ephesus was making the mistake

         of allowing themselves to being led astray by these false teachings.

He reminded Timothy: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is a trustworthy saying which deserves full acceptance.

If this congregation was going to continue and to share the good news with others,

          they must have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales.

They must be nourished on the truths of the faith, on all that Paul had taught them.

In order for Timothy to be successful he needed to turn the people back to the true

          gospel, through preaching, and teaching, and public reading of Scripture.

If the Ephesian Church was going to survive, it would need

          the good leadership of Timothy, to bring it back to true Christian teaching.

Although this letter addresses an historical situation from the first century,

          many of the problems in the early church, persist today.

In his instructions, Paul counseled Timothy to combat heresy,

           not by being forceful and argumentative, but by living an exemplary life,

           and by bring order to the church.

If the people recognized their mistakes, and corrected them,

          they would survive as a thriving congregation,

           teaching others about the love and forgiveness god offered.

Paul's challenge to live a model life applies directly to us.

It remains a powerful prescription for the Christian life.

His words to Timothy and the Ephesians, are still important for us today.

A congregation had grown considerably

          and began to make plans for a new church building.

Several months before they moved into their new structure,

          their ministry staff met at the new site for a special staff meeting.

Most of the building still wasn't carpeted, and some of the rooms still had no drywall.

They handed out magic markers, and a few Bibles.

They instructed the staff members to go to the classrooms and offices

          where they would be working and write Scripture verses on the concrete floors.

The Pastor told them: "Soon the Scriptures will be covered with carpet.

          But I hope you will always remember what you have written today.

         And what we do today will be a very real reminder

                     that we are always to stand on God's Word."

The staff really got into the project.

Some of them used cans of spray paint so the words would show up better.

Those involved with the children's ministry wrote things like:

           "Let the little children come to me…for the kingdom of heaven

            belongs to such as these."

In the education wing, the adult education ministers wrote things like:

          "Study to show yourself approved unto God," and

          “Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

In the music practice rooms, the music ministers wrote:

          "Sing and make music unto the Lord," and

          “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

In the offices of the preaching team, they wrote passages like:

          "Preach the Word in season and out of season," and

         "Watch your life and doctrine closely,

                   if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

The Scriptures on the floor idea caught on,

           and soon many church members followed suit.

In a matter of weeks, there were Scriptures all over the concrete floors,

            down hallways, and even on stairways.

Parents brought their children to the building

          to write their favorite Scriptures on the concrete floors.

One of the small groups volunteered to help clean the building one afternoon.

As they were preparing to leave, the Prayer Leader of the group, said,

             "Why don't we write down a Scripture reference in one of the rooms

             before we leave?"

So they found a space which didn't have any Scripture written yet.

One of the group members said: How about the passage on which Jesus said,

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

So they wrote it. Then, someone asked what the reference was.

There was silence for several moments, and then one of them said:

           “I think it's Matthew 18:28.”

So they wrote: "Matthew 18:28" and the group's name on the floor.

Later that evening the group leader received a phone call.

Someone got out their Bible to double-check the reference.

He said, "Oh no. It's Matthew 18:20, not 18:28."

The group leader asked the obvious question: "What does verse 28 say?"

The caller hesitated and then read: When that servant went out,

                   he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii.

                  He grabbed him and began to choke him.

                  "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

The group leader murmured: "I suppose if we are ever standing in that classroom,

          and suddenly have the urge to choke someone, we'll know why!"

In spite of the mistake, this project became a dramatic reminder to all of them

          that the church has been called to stand upon the Word of God.

This is the essence of Paul's exhortation to Timothy:

             “Are we standing upon the Word of God?”

We are human, and we do make mistakes.

And some of them can be very serious.

But let us always turn to God and his teachings, so we stand on his word,

          and not wander off into false teachings.

Who we follow makes all the difference in our lives,

and in the lives of others.

AMEN