

## Good Works As A Community Project

Titus 3:12-15

*Oct. 10, 2021*

In the late 1990s, Richard Carlson wrote a book by the title, “Don’t Sweat The Small Stuff”.

I confess that I have not read this book, although I am sympathetic to what I understand the phrase to be saying.

In a context where we have competing responsibilities and a myriad of challenges, we need to engage in a measure of triage.

We need to separate what is *primary* from what is *periphery*.

While I am sympathetic to the need to make such distinctions, I don’t like the idea of kicking “the small stuff” to the curb.

You may recall that we began this series in Titus acknowledging the temptation to skip past Paul’s introduction.

Our instincts may be similarly stirred as we wade into the concluding verses of Paul's letter to Titus.

Paul's closing remarks appear quite ordinary and, in a sense, they are.

And yet, there are some important principles to be drawn from this brief section.

Accordingly, my encouragement is this:

"Don't *miss* the small stuff."

When Paul declares that "**All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable**" (2Tim. 3:16), he is including the obscure parts.

Indeed, God speaks in the minutiae.

God speaks in the closing verses of Titus and what He says here is extremely valuable.

Beginning with verse 12, note *how strategic Paul is*.

Paul is not “flying by the seat of his pants” as it were, but rather it is clear that there has been thoughtful planning about the next steps for ministry in Crete and elsewhere.

Paul says to Titus, “**When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there**” (3:12).

The reason for sending **Artemas** and/or **Tychicus** to Titus is apparent in Paul’s commission for Titus to join him in **Nicopolis**.

Paul feels a need for Titus to assist him, but he doesn’t want the Christians in Crete to be shorthanded.

Paul doesn’t say, “Titus, come to Nicopolis right away, I need you here.”

If Titus were to immediately go to Nicopolis this would put the congregations in Crete in a difficult position.

Accordingly, Paul says, “***When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis***”.

If I may be critical of our own tradition for a moment...I don't think the Presbyterian Church has been very good with this.

In almost every instance when a pastor transitions, there is little or no notice given to the congregation that is being left behind.

Pastoral transitions in our day almost always leave behind a congregation with a rather sudden leadership deficit.

The apostle Paul models something different for us.

Paul has the wider Church in view and so as he calls Titus to join him, he has persons in mind that will go in place of Titus.

Notice also, the ordinary language that Paul employs here.

Paul says, “***I have decided to spend the winter (in Nicopolis)***” (3:12).

What you don't hear Paul say is, "God told me to stay in Nicopolis."

Nor does he say, "I feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit to stay in Nicopolis."

He doesn't even say, "After considerable prayer it became clear that I should remain in Nicopolis."

I'm not suggesting Paul didn't pray about this.

But I think it is worth noting that Paul didn't give in to the temptation to legitimize his actions by spiritualizing his decision.

He simply says, "**I have decided to spend the winter (in Nicopolis)**".

This could make for an interesting conversation later today if someone asks you what you learned in church today.

"What did Pastor Bryn teach on this morning?"

“Oh, he told us about the time Paul decided to spend the winter in Nicopolis.”

“Really? That’s it?”

“Well, we also learned that Titus was invited to join Paul there, but that he should wait for the arrival of Artemas or Tychicus first.”

You see, the apostle Paul is sweating the small stuff, and it’s a good thing.

*Paul is strategizing in a manner that helps the people of God and pays attention to needs of the wider community.*

We see this also in verse 13:

**“Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.”**

It appears that **Zenas** and **Apollos** are visiting Crete and that Titus possesses sufficient material resources to assist them.

As Paul envisions **Artemas** and/or **Tychicus** moving in, and Titus moving out, he is mindful of how other colleagues would be impacted by this transition.

Titus is instructed to stay in Crete until his replacement arrives...And, in the meantime, he should furnish **Zenas** and **Apollos** with resources, which will assist them as they head to their next destination.

Before we move on to verse 14, there is one more thing I would like to highlight...

Of the four men named by Paul in these closing verses, only two of them are familiar to us.

**Apollos** is likely the most well known to us, from the Book of Acts and from 1Corinthians.

**Tychicus** you may recognize from a few of Paul's epistles, including 2Timothy where he is said to be coming to Ephesus to replace Timothy (2Tim. 4:12).

But **Artemas** and **Zenas** are mentioned nowhere else in the New Testament.

And yet, it appears that each is playing a significant role in the development of the Early Church.

I highlight this because of our tendency to focus on the primary leaders.

We think of the expansion of the Early Church and we immediately think of Peter, and Paul, and James...

And what we forget is that there was, operating in the background, an army of men and women who made valuable contributions to the maturation and expansion of the Church.

Men like **Artemas** and **Zenas**.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans there is a much longer list of lesser-known Christian leaders.



The closing verses in a number of Paul's letters serve to remind us that *the Gospel of Christ is not advanced by a select few, but by a host of faithful saints*—most of whom aren't well known.

This has been true for the Christian Church globally...And it is true of the Christian church locally.

And yes, this has been true of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Kirk.

I have been here long enough to observe some ebbs and flows in our progress.

I would submit that our seasons of greatest growth and advancement correlate closely with those times of greatest engagement from our members and adherents.

I realize that the current pandemic has arrested that engagement for many of our people.

But as we seek to return to a point where we are once again expanding our influence for Christ, it must be stated *how much we need you*.

Look with me please at the final exhortation in Paul's letter to Titus...chapter 3, verse 14:

**“And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”**

As we've noted in previous messages, it is not enough to simply engage in good works of our choosing.

For Paul, the twin aim of doing good works is to bring glory to Christ and to be helpful to God's people.

And because this is neither automatic nor easy, Paul says we must **“learn”** to be devoted to good works (3:14).

In other words, *we figure out what we are supposed to be doing while in community with one another.*

How else will we know which are the **“cases of urgent need”**?

And by “**urgent need**”, I’m not simply thinking of persons who need some level of assistance with food and clothing.

There may be an **urgent need** for the person who is tending to their elderly and ailing parent.

There may be an **urgent need** for the person whose spouse has just died.

There may be an **urgent need** for the couple whose marriage is coming apart.

There may be an **urgent need** for the family struggling with a child who has gone astray.

But how will we know if we are not together?

How will we know if we have isolated ourselves?

Before I had ever heard of a thing called COVID-19, I used to tell people that gathering on Sunday morning for an hour and a half is not enough to be properly connected to a local faith community.

I recommended a person also attend a small group Bible study, and find a way in which they could serve the local body of believers.

If gathering weekly on Sunday morning is insufficient to forge an effective community, how much more true is this if our only connection to this church is through a computer?

I understand that live stream services and Zoom Bible studies are necessary and helpful.

I get that COVID-19 has compelled some changes.

But what hasn't changed is our need for *authentic community*.

*If we cease doing life with one another we significantly hamper our ability to help one another in our walk with Christ.*

Paul says, **“let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”**

Each of us should be asking the question, “Am I currently being **fruitful?**”

Am I contributing to the health and maturation of a local body of believers?

Perhaps there are some who are listening this morning and are thinking, “Pastor, if you knew what I am dealing with at the moment, you would understand why I haven’t been able to serve others.”

That may be a fair statement.

Not all of us are currently in a position where we can serve others.

Some of us are in the position of **urgent need**, where we require someone to serve us.

But again, *how will we know* if we are not in community with one another?

*We can neither serve, nor be served, unless we are gathering regularly and communicating effectively.*

As Paul closes his letter to Titus, his final words perfectly frame what has come before:

**“All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all” (3:15).**

First, Paul is not alone.

He is in community.

He says, **“All who are *with me* send greetings to you.”**

Secondly, Paul’s community is marked by **“love”**.

**“Greet those who *love* us in the faith.”**

And finally, we are reminded that *the currency of a healthy Christian community is grace.*

As Christians, saved by grace, we are now called to dispense this grace to others.

**“Grace be with you all.”**

As Christians we ought to be dispensing the grace of God to one another.

What a pleasant picture!

Christians dispensing grace to one another.

Do you wish to extend grace to those in urgent need?

Do you wish to be the recipient of grace?

We do this best when we are together.

*Grace flows most freely within a healthy Christian community.*

May this be true of us! Amen.