

October 27, 2019 "Reformation Sunday", Rev. Patricia Weatherwax  
 "Fight and Win; Surrender and Win"  
 (Paul's second letter to Timothy) 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 NRSV

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. ...

At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ...

## INTRODUCTION

I think most of those who know me would guess this: I'm a lover, not a fighter. Boxing and hockey, even football are too physically aggressive for my tastes, not that I am judging if you follow those sports. When I was growing up, even stern voices were deemed "yelling". Yelling and fighting were simply not allowed, although we did watch *Big Time Wrestling*, together. A child of the 60s and 70s, I was a peacenik, a pacifist, probably could have been a conscious objector. I hear Jesus say "love your neighbor" and "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:38), although in the future I'll continue to struggle with those following those directions.

When I was dealing with cancer I really didn't like being called a fighter, the battling analogy. Actually, I felt like a wimp. I wasn't battling, I was meekly following my doctor's orders. I surrendered to the disease and it's harsh treatment, and I won. But, it wasn't a good fight.

What is? What makes a good fight?? "This well-known and oft-quoted passage is quite significant in that this epistle was Paul's last before his martyrdom in A.D. 67. It is called a deeply moving affirmation of his unwavering faith and unyielding love for the gospel of Jesus Christ" (GotAnswers.com).

The apostle and writer, Paul, thinks his execution is drawing close. He writes this well-smithed phrase: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Paul writes that he fought *the good fight*. Not a fight in the physical boxing sense, (barbaric) but in the emotional and spiritual sense, which I think is awesome. So here's Paul, writing a letter to Timothy, a younger apostle, his "Joshua", the one who will be carrying on the mission of the good news of grace not works.

He's speaking about the past, present and future; Paul covers all the bases. (I do like baseball, there's not much fighting!) I'm always sad when the World Series finishes baseball off for the season. (Go Astros!)

## THE GOOD FIGHT, PAST TENSE “I have **fought** the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7)

If you were hearing or reading my summer sermons, *and* if you remember - I used Brene’ Brown’s book “Rising Strong: the Reckoning, the Rumble and the Revolution”- that we need to assess the stories we tell ourselves. I also addressed the reformed doctrines, abbreviated TULIP. Except we never got to P!

So, finally, today we get to “Perseverance of the Saints”. This one follows the others, the ones that say: “if God wants you, God gets you, God’s grace is irresistible!” And this one adds, “and God keeps you! You are eternally secure because God loves you and holds you”. Cool, huh?

We do need to note that the word is perserverance not preservation, although both apply. **God** perserveres- keeps coming to us, wants to be close, even if we are walking another way. That’s reformed theology. Nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:38-39). And as the communion liturgy says: “we are preserved by God’s providence”. It’s about God’s faithfulness, not about ours. God, through Christ has already won the fight for us. <http://www.prca.org/fivepoints/chapter5.html>

But before this reformed theology got established- the part that’s more reformed than the Lutherans, Martin Luther himself was in big trouble.

Luther had reemphasized the neglected doctrine of justification by faith alone...

October 31st, 1517, is often given as the date this process began. That is the day, as Phillip Melanchthon later told the story, that Luther posted his *95 Theses*. He intended them only as points for debate, but their sharp criticism of the profitable system of indulgences soon brought him into conflict with religious and secular authorities. He refused to back down, one thing led to another, and the rest is history.... (He said something like:) “I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. So help me God. Amen.”

Luther’s collected works, issued later under his supervision, give the closing words as, “Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.”

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/blog/post/here-i-stand-i-can-do-no-other/>

Before all the reformers, but after Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension, Paul was trying to get this “justification by faith” stuff flowing to the Jews and the gentiles who were following the way of Christ. The established religious tradition was supported by works righteousness. “Follow the 10 Commandments and all the codes derived from them to live right.” But how good is good enough? Only God is truly good.

In other words, Paul taught that our past only matters because it reminds us of the goodness and faithfulness of God, to bring us to the present and future. We get more opportunities to live for God’s glory. Verse 17 of 2 Timothy 4 says, Paul believed: “the Lord stood by me and gave me strength”.

God was there in the past, with the apostle Paul, with Martin Luther, with us.

## THE GOOD FIGHT, PRESENT TENSE “keeping the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7

The phrase *fight the good fight* refers to doing the next right thing, and keeping at it. This was another theme of Paul's when he was trying to encourage faithful daily living. We read in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 3:

I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead....

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I **focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead**, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But **we must hold on to the progress we have already made.**

That focusing and holding fast and looking forward in the present are all part of who we are as Christians. We are paying attention and thinking. The phrase to remember is that we are "reformed and always being reformed by the Word of God".

It's not about change for cultural reasons, or change because "we can". Reforming according to the word of God means in the present tense we are aware of ways to grow and think and worship, as we believe God intends. So I mess with the Glori Patri and the Doxology, but I don't mess with the 10 Commandments, the Great Commandment (love God, love others) that we read earlier, or the Great Commission (go into the world in Jesus' name, remembering that God goes with us).

We're thinking Christians. We're a "New Kind of Christian" (Brian McLaren, 2001), not asking "what would Jesus do", But "what is Jesus doing?" We are paying attention and we are aware of the work and directing of the Holy Spirit in Battle Creek Michigan, today!

In the verse just before our text for today, Paul wrote this: "But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you" (2 Timothy 4:5).

We have a future. We don't want to forget what we've learned. "God's not done with us yet!"

### **THE GOOD FIGHT, IN THE FUTURE TENSE**

"I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished the race.... there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness."

You only finish an organized race one time. And so, what have you learned? That God's not done with you yet. This race, this work, this life isn't over. You have a future. Many of us *love* the verse from Jeremiah 29:11- That the Lord's plan is to give us "a future with hope"! **We finish the race, only once. But our future has two aspects.**

Isn't it interesting that we can't know the future of today or tomorrow, but we can know the future of our eternity? Most of what comes next in this life is unknown and unpredictable, and may be difficult. Life, for me was seriously normal on one day, and totally upside down the next. Some of you have had experiences like that. Or even really typical situations that when the dust settled, it landed far differently than we could "ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20)! We love and serve a God of mysterious, and occasionally mischievous, ways.

Paul described his future this way, to Timothy:

.... From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (that's us!) ...

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. ...

Known and predictable -glory for sure Your future is foreseeable, if not exactly knowable right away. In regard to the earthly stuff you will be "rescued", God will journey with you up and down every mountain. In regard to your eternity, you are: "saved for God's heavenly kingdom".

We will continue to live through some troubles, that is almost certain. Illness and death will be our final struggle, before the eternal life begins. Paul advised a long-range focus because: "The things that can be seen don't last, but the things that can't be seen are eternal". (2 Corinthians 4:18) All this, everything that we can see, is temporary, but what we can't yet visualize, is forever.

Here's how Jeff said it last week:

"The Christian hope is a real hope. First of all, this means it is a biblical hope. ... Whatever we believe about our future must be consistent with what is taught in Scripture. (past)

Secondly, ... it is a hope that applies to the real world. God does not promise to remove all pain from our lives but to see us through the trials of life. (present)

Thirdly, to say that the Christian hope is a real hope is to say that the outcome is assured.... It is a hope based on credible evidence and the clear promise of God. It is a hope in a real Savior who lived, died and lives again." (a glorious future) (JSC, Oct 20, 2019)

How do we know we've won the good fight that we fought?

We might have some successes in this life, but we don't win the battle until the day we die and finish our race. At the grave site we declare: "In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection through our LORD, we commend our loved ones to God's care". When surrender ourselves and our families to God's eternal care, we will have won the good fight.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus said: " Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). We don't have to fight our way through

life, we can surrender. One of my favorite Christian songs is “The Warrior is a Child.”  
 (CCLI# 637582) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=saA8Azkji2>

Lately I've been winning  
 Battles left and right  
 But even winners can get  
 Wounded in the fight.  
 People say that I'm amazing  
 Strong beyond my years,  
 But they don't see inside of me  
 I'm hiding all the tears.

They don't know that  
 I go running home when I fall down.  
 They don't know Who picks me  
 Up when no one is around.  
 I drop my sword and cry for just a while  
 'Cause deep inside this armor  
 The warrior is a child.

Unafraid because His armor is the best.  
 But even soldiers need a quiet place to rest  
 People say that I'm amazing,  
 Never face retreat.  
 But they don't see the enemies  
 That lay me at His feet.

They don't know that I go  
 Running home when I fall down.  
 They don't know Who picks me  
 Up when no one is around.  
 I drop my sword and look up for a smile  
 'Cause deep inside this armor,  
 Deep inside this armor,  
 Deep inside this armor  
 The Warrior is a Child.

**You are a child of God. Fight like one. Surrender and win.**