

Opening Prayer

What is beauty?

What are the lovely things of the world?

Things that bring me joy can be objects of horror to others

Places that bring me peace can agitate and upset others

When I see beauty

What do you see?

When I feel joy

What do you feel?

Where I find peace

What rises up in you?

God who creates all these things

Gift us vision to see your hand at work

Even in those places and times that cause us to shudder

Guide our sight to the places you are turning back disorder

Fill our hearts with longing to bring hope to our world

Teach us to watch and to wait and to act

In concert with your Spirit

That the beauty and joy and peace that you create

Might fill us to overflowing

Not as cookie cut vessels standing in line

But with all the little and large differences

Of which we are made

We bring our hopes and fears and disappointments and failures to you now.

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, whatever good we do and suffering we endure, heal our sins, help us to grow in holiness, and reward us with eternal life. Amen.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Reflection

It occurs to me that the church has a problem. We find ourselves stuck in a paradoxical situation where we are torn between our understanding of 'sound doctrine,' and the temptation for accumulating teachers who suit our desires. The problem is that we have lost the, I'm not sure if it is the ability or the willingness or the courage to figure out what is a desire and what is doctrine.

There are those who claim that the traditions of the church make it clear just what is sound doctrine and what is not. I'm not sure that it is entirely intentional, but this completely fails to account for the fact that sound doctrine has changed over the centuries. And it has changed between branches of the church. Protestant versus Catholic versus Orthodox versus the myriad of other branches of Christianity, all with their own definitions, supposedly written in stone. It leaves me wondering if our desires are all we have to work with because determining which doctrine is sound seems to depend more upon the preferences of our leaders than upon anything else at all.

'Ah,' you might say, 'we need only turn to the Bible to clear everything up in a moment.' Only, that is clearly not true either. Take any piece of Scripture you care to name and there will be PhDs lining up to take a multitude of different interpretations to task.

How, then, do we know what to do?

I am going to go a long way out on a very thin limb and say that I think God has built into us an ability to discern the deepest things of the Spirit. We know, because it is built into us, even those who are new to the faith, what is of God and what is not. We also know that much of what people call, 'sound doctrine,' is a time-honoured way of keeping people away from the edge by putting up more and more barriers to prevent them getting close. To the point that you can barely determine there is an edge there any more.

When Jesus died we are told the curtain in the temple that represented the barrier between God and the people was torn in two. The writer to the Hebrews tells us we can have confidence to enter the Holy Place – the bit hidden by the curtain – through Jesus.

I don't think Paul was telling Timothy to erect barriers to keep him away from the edge. Quite the opposite. I think he was telling Timothy, 'You know what is right because God has written it on your heart. Stick close to the edge because it is there that you will see God at work in your life and the lives of everyone around you.' It is all those people around us trying their best to tell us to stick to the tried and true ways of the traditions of the church who are the teachers who suit our desires. They will tell us the barriers they erect between us and God are put there for our safety. 'Trust us,' they say, all while hemming us in with rules and regulations, pulling us further and further away from the edge of the Spirit at work.

We are people created to be creators. Creating requires taking risks. It requires skirting the edge and even sometimes falling over the edge. We are people called to be on the edge. There will be a ton of mistakes along the way. We will frequently need picking up, dusting off and setting on our way again. The myths of Paul's warning are those built up by those who want to keep us safe. They do it with good intent and desperately want to care for their people. They have simply lost sight of the call to create that brought the world into being and fashioned us, the images of God, as fellow creators.

Sound doctrine will never dampen that urge to co-create with God. Even when in our eagerness we screw up and make messes, God will honour our faithfulness and help us to do better.

We Pray

Creating God, as we look around we see that much of our creating is prone to mistakes and disappointment. We also see that we frequently fail to even try for fear of failure or of stepping over boundaries set in place for our safety. Gift us courage to dance at the edge of your work, to sing as if you are the only one listening, and to be the way we are made.

Amen.