

“TO THE CHURCH IN LYNDEN.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

November 20, 2016, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Mark 7:37; I Corinthians 10:31-33; 14:40; II Timothy 4:6-10

Introduction.

Paul wrote 13 letters, 9 to churches and 4 to men who were pastors or elders in churches. Some of the letters have personal instructions and personal greetings and even what appear to be rather mundane practical matters of daily life.

II Timothy 4:11-13, 21 Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. 12 Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. 21 Do your best to come before winter.

Titus 3:12-13 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. 13 Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing.

Philippians 4:2-3 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel

Even financial matters are talked about.

I Corinthians 16:1-4 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 3 And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. 4 If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

Paul is addressing practical concerns in the life of the church, he is taking care of business. This morning I want to give a personal and practical word to the church at Lynden with an encouragement and call to do all things well. And to lay further groundwork for that exhortation, I begin with God.

God has done all things well.

At the conclusion of the six days of creation:

Genesis 1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Out of nothing, God made everything good. God is good at making things good. And even in the midst of the fall and sin and evil, God is still God and He is making all things good. Jesus is God and all that Jesus does is good. People couldn't help but notice.

Mark 7:37 They were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well.”

Indeed, Jesus only does all things well. When nothing else makes sense, rest in that. Draw comfort and strength from that. He does all things well.

Have you ever eaten something that was prepared or cooked to perfection? Have you ever eaten some fruit or vegetable that was ripe to perfection? That’s what Jesus is doing in us, bringing us to perfection, to maturity, to Christ-likeness, to glory.

This is the key to understanding our lives. He causes all things to work for His glory and our good. He does all things well. For the believer in Christ, if it’s not good, it’s not done yet.

From the beginning to the end, from cradle to grave, from our first awareness of the conviction of our sin to the last awareness of our forgiveness and salvation, when we get to heaven we will be able to look at our lives and say, “yes, it is good what He has done.”

We will look at all the setbacks, all the sicknesses, all the losses, all the disappointments, all the twists and turns, all the things we could make no sense out of at all, the hard knocks and painful lessons, all the discipline, we will say, “My Jesus has done all things well!”

We are called to be like Christ, to imitate Christ, to do all things well, big things and little things, the ordinary and mundane things, things individually and corporately.

Let me reflect with you how that might look here in the church in Lynden.

Doing Well

Doing all things well means doing things decently and in order, doing our business well for the glory of God.

You remember in January our council formed a task force and gave them a mandate “to review and then revise or create as needed First CRC’s Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Position Statements, and Church policies to ensure that First CRC has the broadest religious liberty protections under the law.”

That task force made up of Jim Aguirre, Ron Kramer, Galen Laird, Kathryn Van Weerdhuizen and Brian Vander Woude met almost weekly for eight months.

They researched and revised and reviewed, got input from our denomination, sought counsel from our insurance company and from a lawyer and revised our Articles of Incorporation and created new bylaws.

Beyond that they revised or created polices for employment, membership, facility use and weddings. Those policies are in a stand up file on the information table if you want to read them.

The Executive committee and then the entire council went through all the documents line by line to get to the place where we are today. The task force is to be commended for they have done well, exceeding our expectations. I am proud of them and thankful to God for them.

Next Tuesday evening, November 29 at 7 pm at our annual congregational meeting we will ask you to come and vote on the revised Articles of Incorporation and the new Bylaws.

Our goal is to provide the best spiritual and legal protections we can for our church family, to do all things well and decently and in order.

Spending Well

At next week's annual congregational meeting we will also be voting to approve the 2017 budget which is in your boxes this morning. Again our goal is to do all things well and to spend God's resources well, to His glory and to the advancement of His kingdom.

We have an excellent Finance Ministry Team made up of Paul Assink, Keven Berendsen, Jacob Buurma, Kim Ryskamp, Larry Stap, Ted Sullivan and Jerry Zylstra.

You will notice this year's budget looks very different from all previous years. Everything we have done in the past is still in there but it has been formatted differently. It's a ministry budget showing how we do ministry and how much we have allocated in each of our ministry areas.

There are four areas, Ministry and Worship, Programs, Buildings and Grounds and Administration.

There is one new line item that I would speak to briefly. It is the summer intern position. Students at seminaries preparing for pastoral ministry are required to do a summer internship in a church. I did when I was in seminary. Seminaries are always looking for churches willing to be an intern site.

It's a 10-week summer internship designed to give the student the broadest experience possible in all the facets of pastoral ministry. They will teach an adult SS class, preach a few times, do visitation, assist in worship and at funerals, attend council meetings and other ministry meetings, shadow the pastor, watch, listen and learn.

The budget item of \$10,000 includes \$6,000 for salary and up to \$4,000 for housing expenses, unless there is a cheaper option like someone having an apartment or empty basement or other suitable arrangement depending on whether the student is married or has kids.

This is a way for us to give back to the denomination and to be a blessing to a student preparing for the pastoral ministry.

This position is not guaranteed, it depends on a student wanting to come here, and it depends on an interview and our approval of the student. Your prayers are appreciated and needed. We want to do this well.

While we are on the subject of finances let me speak to two opportunities to do well.

At the conclusion of the service this morning the deacons will be at all the doors handing out a yellow Thanksgiving Offering envelop which we will collect this Thursday morning at our 10 am Thanksgiving Day offering. There are lines on here for you to designate how you want your contribution allocated according to the list of options given you on this document that was in your box or can be found on the information table. Every year I am amazed at the incredible generosity of this congregation. Last year was just over \$40,000! Talk about doing well.

Finally, you may have noticed an announcement a few weeks ago in the bulletin from our treasure Paul Assink asking us to increase our giving to the operating fund. You responded well in October, but we are still off by about \$25,000. We aren't in panic, we are not spending everything budgeted, but here is the question. Would God enable us to end the year well? Prayerful consider whether you are able to give some extra. But in order to affect this year's budget you would have to give this extra Thursday morning or next Sunday. What we receive in November will determine what we can do in December.

Building Well

Let's talk about building well. Phase I was the whole front entrance and narthex. Phase II was the north offices and Loft addition we dedicated in May 2014. Glory to God it is a beautiful addition, it was built well and it was built debt free.

Our Long Range Planning Ministry team has been meeting over a year on Phase III. It has been a desire of many in our church to have a completely handicapped accessible ground floor fellowship hall and kitchen and a larger and safer nursery. We envision a place where our whole church family can gather for fellowship, celebrations, for meals together.

An added incentive to this effort is the fact that our old education building is becoming more and more costly to maintain and repair. The Long Range Planning team is getting closer to releasing some concept ideas of what such a building might look like. You may remember we went through a couple of concept drawing phases on Phase II before coming up with our final result.

Pray for Long Range Planning and Council, pray for unity in our body and for God's provision of wisdom and finances. One big item of praise is we have almost \$300,000 in our building fund. My prayer is that God would surprise us all and do what He did last time and enable us to finish the project debt free and able to build well to the glory of God.

Living Well.

Our Christian life has two halves, our individual relationship with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and our corporate relationship with the body of Christ, His church.

American Christians don't tend to think about or emphasis the corporate side as much. We don't think of ourselves being in covenant community with each other.

This is why you sometimes hear people say they are Christians but they don't go to church or they can worship just as well out in nature, on the golf course or in the mountains or even in the

mall. You can worship in those places, that's for sure, the question is who or what are you worshipping.

The church is the Bride of Christ and the Body of Christ. To neglect the church is to neglect Christ. It's a little like saying, "Robert, I really like you, but I can't stand your wife."

Someone once said, "He who won't have the church for his mother, can't have God for his father."

What we have here is really important and living well together is really important. God puts a very high priority on His people assembled together. The Bible is written to the assembled and gathered people of God. God speaks to us in community. Christian growth and maturity takes place best in community. God sanctifies us through those around us, through our friends, spouses and children, and through our fellow believers. Love grows not when it is directed toward us but when we direct it toward others and serves others.

This visible gathering here today is a huge sign of God's grace. Millions of Christians around the world only dream of this. They don't dare gather in groups of more than a dozen for fear of drawing attention. Visible fellowship like this is a blessing not to be taken for granted. The physical presence of other Christian should be a source of joy and strength and encouragement.

We should give thanks God has placed us in this place of Christian fellowship. By giving thanks we open our souls up to receive the blessing He intends to give us here. If on the other hand, we grumble and complain and just see the weaknesses or negatives then we will hinder what God wants to do in us and for us through the spiritual fellowship here.

To live well takes community. May we strive to live in covenant community together well, and in living well together may we bring glory to God and light to our community.

Finishing Well.

II Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

How do we finish well? Starting is easy. Starting an exercise program or a diet is easy, sticking to it is hard. Getting married is easy, staying married is hard. Becoming a Christian is relatively easy.

The Christian life has been called a long obedience in the same direction. To finish any long race takes endurance and endurance takes daily practice, perseverance and persistence. You get energy for the long haul from regular prayer and Scripture and weekly fellowship and preaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

To finish the race, it helps if we have others cheering us on and encouraging us to keep going and not quit and give up. To persevere one must keep going despite many obstacles.

Paul uses the image of fighting the good fight. Most of us don't like that image. As parents we spend huge amounts of energy trying to break up or stop fights. Most of us would say we are not very good at conflict and so we are conflict avoiders.

But fights are sometimes the only way to move forward, the only path to peace and truth and faith. Where would we be today without Peter and Paul standing up and defending the faith even to the death? Where would we be today without the Reformation, if God had not raised up fighters like Luther, Calvin and Knox; like Guido de Bres and Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus and the defenders of the truth at the great Synod of Dort.

Do you think faith comes easy? We must fight the enemy of our souls who relentlessly attacks and we need the body to help in that. We must fight against the onslaught of our secular culture and all the media and advertising. The Christian life is not a walk in the park; it is a war on a battle ground requiring the armor of faith, righteousness, prayer and God's Truth.

How important is this? Right after these words of Paul he tells Timothy.

II Timothy 4:9-10 Do your best to come to me soon. 10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Without fighting we will become like Demas, without fighting we will fall in love with this world and worldly things and worldly pleasures and pursuits. Fight with God's strength, fight depending on God's grace, fight with faith and fight for faith.

To persevere and fight to the finish it helps if there is a prize, an incentive, a worthwhile reward. For Paul and for us there is.

II Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to *all who have loved his appearing*.

Love Jesus, long for His coming. With this in your mind's eye you will live well, fight well and finish well.

May we strive and live and act and work to the end that God will say to us individually and corporately, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Prayer: Holy Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, the great head of His Church, pour out your Holy Spirit in this place for your glory. Grant us your generous grace enabling us to do well, spend well, build well, live well and finish well. Build us up in our faith and in our love for you and each other. Strengthen our unity against all that seeks to divide us. Grant us wisdom and discernment for the decisions ahead. Guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus and make us to be more like Him, doing all things well for your glory. In His name we pray. Amen.