

1 Timothy 1:12-17
Second Sunday after Pentecost, year A
June 7, 2026

When is God's power on display most visibly? It's when things are at their worst. I suppose that thought doesn't make you feel all warm and fuzzy on the inside but that is the reality. I can point to the Scriptures to show you what I mean. Think about it: what if the people of Israel had been fleeing Egypt and they came to the Red Sea and saw a way around it to the north? God could save them from the pursuing Egyptian armies by holding them back for a while, giving the Israelites time to escape. But the Israelites were at their worst, their hearts must have sunk when they saw the Red Sea in front of them with no way around. And that's when God displayed his power by giving them a path of dry ground right through the middle of the sea. What if the warrior Goliath had been, I don't know, my size, instead of a giant man whom David had to face? What if Lazarus had only been sick when Jesus came to him instead of being dead, his body decomposing in the grave for four days?

In every case, things were about as bad as they could be. In fact, in every case, the people involved didn't stand a chance. The only thing that would save them was God coming in and doing something that no human being could do—doing something about which we would have to say, “The only way that happened was by the amazing power of God. There is no other explanation for this. God is powerful, end of story.” You understand what I mean when I say that God's power is on display most visibly when things are at their worst.

Have you experienced that in your life? Have you ever been in a situation so dire that you could see no possible way out, you could see no possible solution, and somehow you came through it unscathed? Perhaps that has happened to you and perhaps you looked back on that troubling time and you said, “Only by the amazing power of God did I get through that.” Because if the situation had been bad but not dire, difficult but not without possible solutions available, you might have said, “I found a way to get through that.” It can only be when things are at their worst that you can say, “Getting through that had nothing to do with me. That was all him.”

Here's the thing: every single one of us has had a moment like that in our lives. And it has been the same display of God's power for each one of us. I'm not talking about those low points in life when God was there to bring you through it—though those are real. There's something else, something common to each of us, something far more serious, something that doesn't just have to do with the few years we live in this world. It has to do with our relationship with God. And it is the greatest display of God's power that you have ever experienced.

And to explain what I am talking about, we turn our attention to the Apostle Paul and to what he writes about himself as he mentors a young pastor named Timothy. He points to his own life and his own ministry as an example of what God did for

him, of what God does for all his people. He tells us in verse 13, **I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.** You might know his story. We first meet Paul in the book of Acts when he stands as a witness to the stoning of Stephen and gives approval of his execution. He worked tirelessly going throughout the regions of Samaria and Judea looking for Christians to persecute and imprison, looking for ways to stop the name of Christ from being proclaimed because he rejected Christ. Violence, blasphemy, persecution—all of this a part of his life. It defined him.

And if you had been a witness to the atrocities he committed, you would say, “There is no way that this man will ever turn to Christ; no way he will ever believe in him; no way he will ever follow him; and there is certainly no way this man will ever go out into the world and proclaim this name like no one has ever done before or since.” Paul was at his lowest. He didn't realize it, of course. In fact, he thought he was following God's will and doing God's work, eliminating any message of messenger who would say that you cannot save yourself by following the law. He was lost. His situation was so dire that there could be no possible way out, he was so far gone that no possible solution existed.

And so it was in that most dire and desperate moment that God's grace was most visibly on display. After describing his actions, Paul goes on to write, **I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** And then a little later on he says this: **But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.**

When things were at their worst for Paul, God's power was most visible. God saved him. And Paul himself tells you that this is the example of that same grace, that same power of God is working in your life, too. I know none of us is the Apostle Paul and I know that we can't look at his violence and blasphemy and persecution and say, “I did those same things,” but we can look at ourselves and say, “I am the worst of sinners.” Because we know the sins that camp out in here. Probably better than anyone.

Because we know the ways we have blasphemed God. In the worst possible ways. We have known his commands to love and serve and we have said, “I'm not doing that. God can't tell me what to do, God is not in charge of me, I do not submit to his will.” With every foul word, every hate-filled or lustful thought, every act of selfishness—with every sin—that's what we're saying. And so we do violence when we see someone in need and refuse to serve them, allowing them to remain in their suffering. We persecute God and others by refusing to share his love, refusing to share the gospel, refusing to live out our faith.

Is that where you are, fellow sinner? That's pretty low, that's pretty desperate. Can you see a solution to that problem? Do you see a way out, a way to get back up? Dear Christian, understand and know and take comfort in this truth that when things are at their worst, that is when the power of Christ is most visibly on display. As Paul tells us, **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.**

Think for a moment about what a beautiful saying that is: Christ Jesus came into the world. Christ Jesus, the son of God himself, already appointed from the beginning of time to do this. When sin came into the world, God wasn't keeping an eye out for someone who might possibly come along and maybe fit the bill of Savior. He chose Christ, who is God who came from his glorious and majestic throne in heaven where he has all power and glory. And he set that power and glory to the side and he came here. He left his heavenly throne. He made the move, he initiated it. He wasn't forced to come, he didn't do it out of obligation, he just came here because that's how much he loves us, that's how much he wants to rescue us from our sins. He came into this world, a place not worthy of him. He came here with all the wickedness and suffering that is a part of it and he made himself a part of it. He remained sinless but he went through everything we do to take on the punishment that sin causes.

He came to save sinners. Not righteous people. Not even people who were pretty good. Not people who showed a spark, who showed that they could be good enough if just given a little help. He didn't come to find the worthy and say, "You've earned this, you've earned my love and forgiveness." He found sinners. He came to save blasphemers and persecutors and violent people. He came to save the worst of the worst. He came to save you and me.

You see, this sin has to be dealt with and the only way to deal with it is by punishing the sinner eternally. You see what a serious problem that is? You see how there can be no hope, no rescue from that? You see how lost we are? That's when the power of God was displayed most visibly. He dealt with it. He was punished. He went through the worst thing imaginable—hell, separation from God—and that's how he saved us. And there is no one too sinful to save. There is no one so far gone that Christ cannot find him and rescue him.

Paul serves as an excellent example of this. He points to his own life, he points to his unbelief, being trapped in sin that was overcome by the mercy and love of God. We know of other examples. In fact, we heard a couple others already today. Moses called by God to do this big thing, leading his own people out of slavery in Egypt. Going up to Pharaoh and saying, "Let my people go." Moses had every reason not to do this; he tried to point out how inadequate he was for such a task. But the answer God gave to every excuse was, "I'm with you and I've never let my people down and I'm not going to start now. You go." We heard about Matthew. A tax collector. Talk about the worst of the worst. He cheated and stole from his own people on

behalf of an oppressive and tyrannical government. And yet Jesus, whose power is so visibly on display, called to him and forgave him and gave him a place among his closest followers.

That's you, too. Paul wrote at the beginning of our text: **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.** Of all the people who didn't deserve to be God's servants, Paul probably considered himself to be at the top of the list. But God loves sinners. He loves Paul, he loves Moses, he loves Matthew, he loves you, he loves me. So much it almost seems impossible. God loves sinners, he pours his grace upon them abundantly. He has done that for you and for me. He has made us his children. He has made us his servants. And if you ever doubt that, look at Christ, know what he can do. See what he did when he came into this world, that he put his power most visibly on display when he found the worst of the worst and he saved you with his love. Amen.