

## 11.12.23 – Pentecost 24

### “A Good Soldier”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

#### **Psalm 138:1-3, 6-8 (NIV)**

*Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart;  
before the “gods” I will sing your praise.

<sup>2</sup> I will bow down toward your holy temple  
and will praise your name  
for your unfailing love and your faithfulness,  
for you have so exalted your solemn decree  
that it surpasses your fame.

<sup>3</sup> When I called, you answered me;  
you greatly emboldened me.

<sup>6</sup> Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly;  
though lofty, he sees them from afar.

<sup>7</sup> Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life.

You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes;  
with your right hand you save me.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord will vindicate me;  
your love, Lord, endures forever—  
do not abandon the works of your hands.

**Leader: These Words of David’s Assurance Are of God!** All: Thanks be to God!

#### **2 Timothy 2:1-10 (NLT)**

*A Good Soldier of Christ Jesus*

<sup>1</sup> Timothy, my dear son, be strong through the grace that God gives you in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

<sup>3</sup> Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. <sup>5</sup> And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. <sup>6</sup> And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. <sup>7</sup> Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

<sup>8</sup> Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. <sup>9</sup> And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. <sup>10</sup> So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

**Leader: These Words of the Apostle Paul Are from God.** All: Thanks be to God!

**Please pray with me:**

Dear Merciful and Warrior God, you fight for us everyday, even before we were born. You fight for our souls, consciences, and for our very beings in this world and the next. We worship and praise you for your eternal love and grace. We thank you for the psalmist who wrote of his faith in your protection. We thank you too for Paul's courageous ministry and encouragement to his apprentice, Timothy. May we be encouraged to press on as well. Speak to us, calming our fears yet bolstering our courage as we too trust in you. Strengthen our discipline and resolve as we face environments hostile to Christ. May we hear your Words and your voice as you speak through this servant. Amen.

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Again, I say on behalf of our church, thank you, Veterans, and families of veterans, for your service to our country in whatever capacity, branch, rank, or role in which you served. Our passages have a loose connection to this day, but I hope it will be a fresh new interpretation.

In our first passage, King David is praising God for his love and loyalty to him, answering his prayer; God's response strengthened David's faith when he ascended to the throne, knowing he would face conflict and war. God should be praised because God does not judge by human standards; he looks to the lowly and humble, not the proud. Remember that David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons—the least who would be anointed king!

The placement of this psalm is interesting. Some commentaries claim it was a response to the exiles' return, perhaps because Psalm 137 is right before it. You remember Don McLean of American Pie recorded it in 1975 "By the waters, The waters, Of Babylon. We lay down and wept, And wept, For thee Zion. We remember, Thee remember, Thee remember, Thee Zion." It was common then in poetry to follow a psalm of lament like #137 with a psalm of praise or thanksgiving. Though David has been in trouble before, he lifts his prayer to God in gratitude for times

when the Lord rescued him or aided his escape. David often thanked God for even the little things of life, like sights, sounds, smells, and sheep, but here he is speaking about God's saving power of life itself.

Veteran's Day reminds us of the courage and commitment our military folks demonstrate. The pomp and circumstance of yesterday's celebrations also remind us of those soldiers who've gone on to heaven, even though we celebrate them on Memorial Day. I do not personally know what makes a good soldier, but from our examples today, movies, and my reading, a good soldier has discipline, ethics, a sense of patriotism, love of country and something bigger than him or herself; they have the physical, emotional, psychological, and hopefully spiritual strength to place themselves in harms way. A good soldier has **courage** yet also **humility** with a willingness to serve others, and the qualities of **commitment, initiative, and obedience** to the chain of command.

Let's look at Timothy and how Paul counsels him to be a good soldier for Christ. He must be focused on his purpose, enduring hardship for the cross, and like an athlete, be competitive in an honorable way; he must be hard-working like the farmer who sacrifices all for healthy crops to feed his family and the community. Paul's apostolic succession plan for Timothy also assumes great faith and loyalty of this young man, demanding a sense of Christian priority among pagans and perseverance to teach and disciple new believers, all the while ministering to the needs of others.

Additional qualities we affirm in our Veterans on this special day are **dedication** and **responsibility**. They take their whole unit and sometimes cities or countries under their protection; there is a

brotherhood or sisterhood not unlike what we see among believers. Paul's succession plan toward Timothy's leadership needed more clarity, so this letter reminds Timothy that as he carries on the work of Christ, it is not for his personal ego or advancement. Timothy must keep his eye on the bigger picture, saving the elect for God's kingdom work. Paul reminded Timothy that times would be tough, but to teach others the gift of surrender to the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Enduring hardship was to be expected as it still is for both missionaries and soldiers serving on foreign and inhospitable soil.

Before becoming a soldier, who we celebrate today, one must endure a grueling bootcamp; depending on the branch of the military, it can range between 8 and 13 weeks of basic training. It's physically and mentally challenging, learning a new language of command, disciplined cleanliness, training with weapons and self-defense skills building, and strenuous exercise to build endurance. They are in cramped quarters far away from home as they adapt to new dangers and risks. They learn to cope with fear as well. Military chaplains help in these areas. Virtues like courage, truth, purpose, and self-control become more important in life and death situations. Wouldn't it be helpful in this world if Christ followers took a similar boot-camp of training? Back in the 50's and 60's young people went to Sunday night Baptist Training Union. It was largely a social time, with games, snacks, some Bible study, and discussion; but what I remember most were the lessons about general living: we learned about discipline, humility, orderliness, conflict management, and were guided in areas of teenage difficulty. There were important informal lessons learned from adults other than one's parents.

The term “good soldier” only occurs here in the New Testament, even though other military metaphors are common, like “putting on the armor of God” in Ephesians 6:10-17. The Hebrew Scriptures spend many pages discussing the wars of territorial conquest and kingly succession, but not necessarily in glowing patriotic and virtuous language. So how can we apply these lessons today? By studying and adopting attitudes of obedience. Paul demands Timothy’s obedience, not to him, but to God. Ministers, athletes, and farmers cannot be distracted from their purposes, and so must be obedient to God’s rules. Athletes may be tempted by pride; and if farmers are distracted from their crops and the natural order of weather, crops will die, and then people will die of hunger. Ministers are susceptible to spiritual warfare if they deviate from their calling, daily disciplines, and anointed purpose. If soldiers deviate from the virtues and practices we discussed today, whole countries can be lost or conquered by the barbaric enemy, and people will die.

All believers, like soldiers, must stay fit and be ready to fight the temptations of this life and be ready to battle evil when it comes. Next week, we’ll look at Paul’s advice to Timothy about how staying in the Word of God will sustain and support his ministry. It will be our thanksgiving gratitude service, too.

Speaking of gratitude, I saw former President George W. Bush on the news yesterday being interviewed about his 9<sup>th</sup> *Honor the Warriors Bike Ride* in Texas. Of course, it takes place every Veteran’s Day all over the country. It began as a way to help recovering wounded soldiers train for a purpose and to cope with depression, limb losses, healed injuries, or symptoms of PTSD. He said that “riding mountain bikes helps them

recover both physically and psychologically, being outside in nature, encouraging one another, it makes you feel wonderful!” He’s 77 himself and still riding. He ended the interview with these words: “I think if everybody would give each other a hug instead of yelling at each other, the world would be a lot better off!” So let your Veterans and Christ followers know of your respect and admiration for all those qualities they demonstrated during their times of service and still do. A “thank you for serving” is a figurative hug and appreciation usually well received. Be a “good soldier” in all you say and do in your life today. Amen! //

**Please pray with me.** Lord and Savior, we thank you for those with gifts of service. Help us to affirm the courageous among us, as we strive to be brave for the cross through the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us to share your love with those who need your grace and mercy. May we study more deeply the Scriptures, praying and listening for your direction, encouraging one another in these anxious times and those we encounter daily. It is in your Son, Jesus’ name we pray, **Amen.**