

## *Hidden with Christ*

Sunday School Lesson

2 Timothy 2:1-16

November 24, 2024

This week I had the privilege of participating in my second Kairos prison ministry weekend. For those who are unfamiliar with Kairos, it is Walk to Emmaus designed specifically for within the prison walls. There are all male teams that go into Men's prisons and all female teams that go into women's teams. Several husbands on the women's team usually come to provide some of the heavy lifting and food pickup. You must apply to serve on a team. After doing the background checks, the volunteer leader will choose his/her team. We typically do two weekends a year for women and two a year for men. To serve on a team, you must commit to four Saturdays of training. A typical Kairos weekend is from 9:30am Thursday until 4:00pm on Sunday. We enter the prison at 7:30am each morning and leave about 8:30pm at night.

Typically, we have 32 volunteers working with 30 inmates. The inmates are divided into five families of six inmates plus a Kairos Table Leader, Assistant Table Leader, Clergy. I was the only ordained clergy on this weekend so four lay people served in the clergy spots. We had 180 inmates interview for the thirty spots and we pick thirty plus alternates. The warden has the final approval.

Prison ministry is not for everybody. In the women's prison, most of the prisoners have a drug related charge but that could be far more than possession or dealing. It could be assault, robbery, prostitution, or murder. It is a ministry of presence, relationship, and witness. If you have trouble being around broken people who both know they are broken and know their brokenness has done great harm, then prison ministry is not for you. It requires being fully present as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This was Kairos #43 at McPherson.

Let us pray

**O Holy God and Creator of the Universe, thank you for being present with us this week. Open our hearts to hear your word so we may be faithful disciples who are known by our love for one another and for our love of our neighbors. Amen.**

Our Purpose Statement: **To contemplate ways to effectively share our faith.**

**O Holy God, transform our lives as we follow you. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and most of all, hearts that do not judge. Amen.**

One of the most effective ways of getting people to understand what you are saying is to a metaphor of something common that they may experience every day. Paul is encouraging Timothy to be strong in the grace of Christ but just what does that mean? Is Paul referring to physical strength, emotional strength, or spiritual strength? To help grasp the concept, Paul uses metaphors of everyday people – a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer.

Everyone knows that soldiers go through extensive training for their positions and they have to be disciplined to obey orders. They cannot go off on their own; they must comply with the orders they are given or else, they will be removed from their responsibilities. When soldiers go through basic training, they are preparing their bodies for the grueling schedule they would keep on the battlefield. They are learning new skills but they are also learning discipline. On the battlefield, they will be given orders to be carried out. Someone else's success will depend on their compliance. Their success may depend on the compliance of another. Our Christian witness is not about just one of us but how authentic we are as a whole. In the military and in spiritual battles, we are only as strong as our weakest link.

The next metaphor is that of an athlete which Paul uses on more than one occasion. An athlete must discipline his mind and his body. He/she must sharpen their physical condition so they are ready to run the race to win. They must watch what they put into their bodies that might slow them down or cause them to be sluggish. An athlete listens to their coach to correct bad habits or learn new plays or skills. The Christian life is not a sprint to be run but a marathon. We will not get where we want to land unless we are willing to avoid those things that keep us from following Jesus in any way. In competition an athlete must be fully present, block out all the noise and distractions that might interfere with his case.

Finally, Paul uses the metaphor of the farmer who wakes up early every morning to start the chores which must be completed every single day. A Farmer gets up early and must prepared the farm first before he plants anything. A farmer does his best to protect his field and keep the crops healthy. When it is time for harvest, the harvest comes first. The last metaphor Paul uses is his own as a prisoner. While his body may be chained, his word is not.

In each of these examples there is something to achieve. A soldier wants victory, an athlete wants to win, the farmer wants a success harvest and finally, the prisoner wants his freedom. None of that will happen without being fully present and not checked out somewhere, not paying attention to what God is doing around you. A battle requires your full attention as does a race. Farmers cannot go on vacation in the middle of harvest. And Paul is not going to make a difference while in prison unless he is will to be fully present among his fellow captives. He does not engage in a long discussion of listening to what they did, followed by some false hope of getting out soon.

If you want to be an effective witness for Christ, you must be fully present. You must be fully present in your humanity and not your judgment. And you must be fully present in recognizing the full humanity of the fellow prisoners by seeing them as people, not prisoners. That can be difficult given our obsession with judging other by their actions. Just as you are fully present with those you know well, you should strive to be present with those you do not know well. Just remember, Jesus is always present with you.

**Send us, Lord, to places that we need to see, to places that need to see us, to places where we are the minority, to places we probably won't be comfortable, and to places you would go if you were here. Amen.**