

⁵The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint^[a] elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe^[b] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

THE LORD IS LOOKING FOR LEADERS

The young student said the words 21 years ago and I don't just remember what she said, but also how she said it. I was teaching Vacation Bible School in the basement of St. Peter Lutheran Church in Savanna, Illinois during my vicar year, which is the third year, the intern year of a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. My wife stopped by the class toting our infant son in his car seat. I don't remember what we were talking about, probably what we were going to eat that night, but as they were leaving, one of the students, an 8, 9 or 10 year old girl said something, "Awe, they get to go home with the Vicar." "Yes, they do my young friend. Yes, they do." It's nice to have an admirer and to enjoy celebrity even if that celebrity status only exists in the words of one fan.

When the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to a young man named Titus, the Apostle Paul already had worldwide celebrity-like status. And thanks to the preservation of the historical writing of the book of the Acts of the Apostles and the many letters of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Paul also has fame that will endure until the end of time. We know Paul's back story: Saul of Tarsus, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, zeal for the Law as understood by the Pharisees, but a persecutor of the church as far as Jesus was concerned. We know how Paul's conversion to the great faith took place: On the way to the city of Damascus, a great light, a fall to the ground, blindness, the ever so dreaded repetition of his name, "Saul, Saul," and the pointed question, "why are you persecuting me?" From there Paul would go on from persecutor to proclaimer. Instead of persecuting Christ Paul would be persecuted for Christ. We know so much about Paul and his work. Paul's great ambition was always to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. God gave the church some people to be apostles and Paul was one of those apostles.

And yet not to be lost in Paul's ambition to preach the gospel in as many places as he could was Paul's concern that the ministry of the gospel would continue in the places he had left and the ministry of the gospel would continue after the Lord called Paul to heaven. We see this ambition is the opening verse of our text, ***"⁵ The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint^[a] elders in every town, as I directed you."*** God had also given the church some to be evangelists. Titus was one of those evangelists. We don't know as much about Titus as we do about Paul. We know his name and not much more. God gave Titus to be an evangelist and God gave some to be pastors or teachers, in this writing to Titus Paul refers to pastors and teachers as elders. We don't their names of these elders, but we do have a description of the qualifications these men were to have as well as the ministry tasks they were to carry out.

The Lord is looking for you to have two qualifications.

Before we get into these qualifications and tasks, it's good for us to contemplate the kinds of leaders God is looking for today. On the island of Crete there were apostles, evangelists and elders: Here at Grace we have pastors, teachers (Lutheran Elementary School teachers and Sunday school teachers and Vacation Bible School teachers), a principals, a choir director, a church president, ministry board chairmen, members of those boards and that is just a start to the list. Some of these people you might know well. Some of these people you know by name. And still others of these people you might not have a clue who they are. The men and women who serve our congregation in these ways are rock stars in the metaphorical sense. God knows their names. God knows their backstories. God knows how they were brought to faith in Jesus. And the Lord is looking for leaders who are like them: who have their qualifications.

The first ministry must is related to a leader's behavior. Paul writes, ***"must be blameless."*** This ministry must is written twice in these five verses and the explanation of what blameless means is expressed in positive and negative terms: ***"faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe^[b] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ... hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ... - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain."***

Where can the Lord find leaders with these kinds of behaviors? Hopefully, in our church. I know this list of behaviors is long and because of its length this list might be intimidating, but these behaviors for leaders are no different than what God is looking for in every Christian. Whether your position is that of a pastor or a plumber, a teacher or a technician, a chairman or a cherry picker you are called as a Christian to keep the commandments, to live a holy and godly life, to let your light shine, to live such good lives in the world of unbelievers that though they may accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven.

So how come not all the Christians on the island of Crete were keeping these behaviors? One reason is because Paul and Titus and the Christians on Crete were doing a good job of making disciples like Jesus did. Jesus ate with prostitutes and tax-collectors. Jesus welcomed sinners. Jesus described the church as a hospital for sinners. Hospitals welcome the injured and sick. Hospitals want the injured and the sick to get well. The church wants people with all the problems that would disqualify them from becoming leaders because the church wants people to get well.

This getting well is achieved through the second ministry must for leaders and that holding onto to what we have come to believe in Jesus. Paul writes to Titus about the potential elders, **“He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.”** The trustworthy message is the Word of God. The Word of God is best summarized in the commandments and the creeds. The trustworthy message shows us our sins and our need for a Savior. The trustworthy message offers us the forgiveness of sins in the person and work of Jesus Christ. His good behavior was necessary so that people would be forgiven from their bad behavior. His good teaching is how the Holy Spirit not only brings people to believe in Jesus, but also equips people, equips you for your ministry tasks.

The Lord is looking for you to complete two tasks.

The Apostle Paul closes our section with the two main tasks the Lord is looking for. Paul writes, **“9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”**

Our Old Testament reading is a good example of a bad example concerning these tasks. Amaziah the priest of Bethel was encouraging King Jeroboam when Amaziah the priest should have been refuting King Jeroboam. Likewise Amaziah the priest was refuting the prophecy of Amos when Amaziah should have been encouraging Amos and his prophesy.

The Apostle Paul could relate to good grief of Amos as could our Savior Jesus. As leaders, they were not only praised. They were persecuted. Christ wasn't just celebrated. Christ was crucified. So how in the world was Titus going to find these elders to serve as leaders in the church? Titus would find them the same way we found a member for the third year in a row to enroll at Martinn Luther College – our college of ministry – to pursue a life of service in the church – and the word of parents and students is that we could send another three members as students a year from now. Closer to home, in the last 12 months our ministry boards, the engines of our congregation, have welcomed a 20-year old and an 80-year old to serve on our School Board and on our Adult Nurture Board. How can we find these leaders? We don't. The Lord looks for them and finds them. The Lord brings leaders to us because the nature of our Lord is to be generous. We see that with creation. Look at the landscapes, the variety of animals and the talents of people and we see the generosity of God. We see the same in the gospel ministry. The Lord is with us and so are his angels. The Lord gives us the Word of God and he gives us the Sacrament, two of the of them. Christ has given us himself and Christ has given us the church.

The Lord is always looking for leaders, for the qualifications of behavior and beliefs, for the tasks of encourage and refuting. This month, our church chairman, Jon Scheel and the committee he is assembling is looking for nominations. The nomination committee will be seeking input from the congregation and will be asking for a number of Grace men to consider a position of leadership at Grace and for men and women to serve on their boards and committees. Pray for Jon and for the nomination committee that is appointed. And pray for the men who will be asked to serve this congregation in a very important way in 2025. Pray for them and pray for the men and women who will be asked to serve on a ministry Board or committee. Pray for them to accept this responsibility and to continue to be blameless and to hold onto the sound teaching and to encourage and refute people according to sound doctrine. You might be one of the people being prayed for, but even if you're not, please pray for how you can best support the gospel and the servants the Lord has sent to serve in a public way. Amen.