Spreading the Gospel

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[0:00] Good morning, everybody. Welcome to Church of the Advent. One of the reasons I love and am thankful for the lectionary, which is the reading plan that we follow, which determines the texts that we look at on Sunday by and large.

One of the reasons I love this is because if we follow it, we end up looking at and preaching on very difficult passages, passages that might otherwise we might be very tempted to avoid.
And yet, because we follow the lectionary, we encounter these passages, and we have an opportunity to mine their riches, to wrestle with them and with God.
You know, the church fathers believed that God actually intentionally puts things in Scripture that are hard to understand, stumbling blocks, because there is tremendous value that comes from wrestling with difficult texts.
So we're thankful that we get to do that this morning. The passage that we're going to be looking at is 1 Timothy chapter 2. We're going to look at the whole chapter. Part of it's printed in your bulletin, but we're going to be looking at the whole chapter.
[1:09] It's probably one of the most hotly debated passages in the entire Bible. The mere mention of this raises the tension in the room.

And I think people begin to brace themselves for disagreement or maybe even division. Ironically, I think this is the exact opposite of what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words.
He has in mind the opposite. Paul's heart in this passage is clearly not to divide. It's actually to call the church together, to come together as a community of prayer and holiness and gospel witness.
So I want us to look at this passage with that in mind. You know, regarding the role of women in the church, there is a strong biblical case to be made on both sides.
This is one of several issues in our church and in our denomination where we believe faithful Christians can disagree. So when we get to that part of this text, which is what it's most well known for, I'm going to give you my best take on what I believe is happening in this passage.
[2:20] For anyone who wants to ask questions or dig deeper, we're actually talking about this right now, this issue in our adult ed class. And we had a great time this morning and we'll be together again next Sunday.

So if you want to follow up and talk more about this, come to that class. That's the perfect place to have that conversation. So I'm going to tell you what I think is happening here, but I also don't want us to lose the forest for the trees.
Because I actually think this passage has a lot to say to everyone in this room, regardless of where you fall on that particular question and issue. So let's pray and look at God's word together.
Our Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for blessing us with your word. And we thank you that every syllable, every punctuation mark, or every jot and tittle in this Bible is here for our nourishment and our edification.
Lord, we cannot live, as your word itself says, without it. And we pray that through your word this morning, you would give us life and that you would give us yourself. We pray that you would prepare us to come to your table through your word.
[3:33] Lord, we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So I actually believe that the key to understanding the entire letter of 1 Timothy is found in Acts chapter 19.

And the story of how the church that Timothy leads was originally started. The context really matters.
The city of Ephesus was dominated by the Temple of Artemis. First century Ephesus was dominated. It was dominated architecturally. It was dominated culturally.

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It was known in the broader empire for the Temple to Artemis. That temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And the cult of Artemis worship had a massive influence over the culture of that city.
In Acts chapter 19, we see that Paul's ministry in Ephesus was very successful. As a result, a large number of Artemis worshipers had converted to Christianity.
[4:36] So many people had converted, in fact, that it had impacted the local economy. The craftsmen who made idols connected to Artemis worship were in danger of going out of business.

They were losing tons of money because all of these Artemis worshipers were becoming Christians. And there was a growing fear that if this continued, the cult of Artemis would lose its influence as the source of the city's fame.
And that the city's fame would be diminished. And so people are so upset about this, the crowds come out and they begin to riot in the streets. And for hours and hours they chant together, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.
Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. There we go.
I thought I was going to be all smooth doing that. So they're out there and they're chanting and they're rioting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.
[5:43] And this tells us something about the makeup of this church. This church most likely had a mixture of people. It had some Jewish people.

And it also had a very large number of former Artemis worshipers. And if you read the whole letter, it's clear that all of the challenges that Timothy faces, I believe, are related to that influence.
And it's clear that the main issue that Paul is dealing with in this letter to Timothy is the problem of false teaching. That false teaching is running rampant.
Gordon Fee, one of the great New Testament scholars of our day, says that nearly every verse in the letter relates in some way to false teaching. In other words, I'll put it this way.
Timothy's main challenge is to help people disentangle their Christian beliefs, their Christian doctrine and practice, from all of these other ideas that are being propagated by false teachers and these influences in the culture.
[6:56] So we see evidence of Jewish influences. So Paul references people wasting time on endless genealogies or forbidding certain kinds of food. But we also see evidence of pagan influences likely from the cult of Artemis.

So Paul references people being led astray by myths and devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. So I believe the key to understanding this letter starts by appreciating the significant influence of the cult of Artemis on this church.
Timothy has to figure out, how do I disciple and catechize converts who have grown up in a city dominated by the cult of Artemis? So at the end of chapter 1, Paul commissions Timothy to fight the good fight by upholding sound doctrine and godly character, and that brings us to the beginning of chapter 2.
And the main concern of chapter 2 is not the ordination of women. The main concern of chapter 2 in its entirety is the spread of the gospel.
It's the spread of the gospel. Two things, that we pray for the spread of the gospel and that we do nothing to hinder the spread of the gospel.
[8:13] So I want to look at those two parts. First of all, verses 1 through 7, that we pray for it. Paul says essentially, pray for all people in every way you can, especially for our leaders, so that we can live a peaceful life.

Now why is this so important? Why is it important to pray for our leaders? Well, so that the gospel can spread unhindered to all people. Because he says, God desires all people to be saved. Everyone. So it says here, God our Savior, verse 4, wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.
Now this would be challenging to modern Western ears because we don't like the idea of exclusivity and people have a hard time with the truth and the reality that Christ is the only way to salvation and to be reconciled to God.
It also would have been challenging to first century ears in Ephesus, but for very different reasons. We know from archaeological evidence that in Ephesus, when people use titles like God or like Savior or like Lord, they weren't talking about the God of the Bible.

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[9:39] They were talking about Artemis. Artemis was God. Artemis was Queen. Artemis was Savior. Artemis was Lord. And the five most common titles used for Artemis include these titles.

First, Queen, Lord, Savior, and God. So I actually don't think it's a coincidence that Paul makes a point at the end of chapter 1 of referring to God as the King of the Ages, Jesus, immortal, invisible, the only God.
And then he goes on in chapter 2, there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man, Jesus Christ. He is in everywhere saying, our God is far superior to your God.
Artemis and the other gods in the Greco-Roman pantheon demanded continual sacrifices. And Artemis was known for being very petty and very impatient if she was neglected to worship she believed she was due.
She was known to be vengeful if you didn't offer the proper sacrifices and the proper devotion. Paul is saying, on the other hand, our Lord, the God we worship, Jesus Christ, he was the one who was willing to offer himself as a sacrifice for us to give himself as a ransom for all.
[11:01] So the point, I believe, that Paul is making is this, that God's desire is for all people to come to know that truth, that Christ alone is worthy of our worship and devotion.

Christ alone is worthy. So Paul is calling us in these first seven verses, pray for all people to know this. Even the kings, even the emperor, everybody.
There wasn't a Christian ruler anywhere in the world at this time. So he's not just saying pray for Christians, pray for everyone. At this time, you know who is the emperor? Nero.
A man known for his cruelty and persecution of Christians. Paul says, pray that Nero would come to know the truth of Jesus. Pray for all leaders. By the way, every time we do the prayers of the people and we pray for all the needs of the world and all of our leaders, regardless of whether we voted for them, we're obeying this command, right?
So here Paul addresses first the need to pray for this, and then he goes on to say, and in the way you live and conduct your life as a church when you gather for worship, don't do anything to hinder the spread of the gospel.
[12:11] Sometimes we need to get out of our own way as Christians. So this is what I believe verses 8 to 15 are all about. So apparently first, there's a problem with men getting angry and fighting with one another.

That doesn't seem like too much of a stretch. There's ongoing conflict, and Paul says that hinders the gospel. When people outside the watching world, when they see us fighting, when they see unresolved conflict, and when that is impeding our worship, that hinders the gospel.
So Paul says, therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. That's to pray like this. It's the Iran's posture. It's the way that Jews prayed.
The Christians inherited that practice from the Jews. Then for the rest of the chapter, Paul addresses women. Now, why do women get so much attention?
Well, I think the answer is pretty obvious. Because simply having women in church alongside men created massive confusion for everyone, Jews and Greeks alike.
[13:15] For the Jewish converts, they were used to women being segregated out during worship. And women were not allowed to study the Scripture. But that's happening in the church.

What do we do with that? For the former Artemis worshipers, they were used to the women being the ones who were up front. In Artemis worship, the women lead in every way.
There were some male priests, but they often occupied subservient lesser roles. The primary spiritual leaders, the people you would see up front leading in the rituals and services, were the women.
And so they come into the church, and it's a mostly male-led movement. What do we do with that? So everybody's looking at these women, and even the women themselves are not quite sure, how is this supposed to work?
So you see a lot of attention being given in the New Testament letters to women's conduct in the church. So they're trying to figure this out. And so, you know, imagine being Timothy.
[14:13] Your job is to figure out how do we integrate women from all of these diverse Jewish and pagan backgrounds to worship together as one church family. And it gets very practical. The first thing he addresses is their attire.

Apparently, women were dressing in ways that were causing problems. What's the issue? Well, they were wearing very elaborate hairstyles and jewelry and things like that.

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And if we look at the culture of Ephesus, we recognize that for women, particularly high-status women, the way they wore their hair and their attire was a way of signaling wealth and status.
So wealthy, high-status women had multiple braids. They had plated hair, often interwoven with gold threads and pearls and jeweled pins. And by the way, this is particularly true among Artemis worshipers.
They would decorate and adorn Artemis, and the priestesses would dress in very elaborate ways with elaborate hairstyles. And so this was strongly associated with that.
[15:18] And so Paul is saying when you do that and when you come into church like that, you're hindering the gospel. It's causing distractions. The church is a place where we don't assert status. The church is a place where we don't put our wealth on display.

Right? Leave the Rolex at home. Right? The church is the place where social hierarchies are turned upside down. The greatest among us are those who serve. So dressing in ways that signal your superiority is a denial of the gospel.
So he calls women, adorn yourselves with modesty and self-control and good works. Don't hinder the gospel. And then we come to the issues of behavior.
This brings us to the passage that has caused so much controversy. Paul goes on to say, a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.
She must be quiet, for Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved, or depending on if you look at the Greek, but she, woman, woman or women, but women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.
[16:30] Now one way of reading this is to see this as Paul laying down a principle of male headship that is rooted in the order of creation.

Men are called to teach and lead in the church, and women are called to a posture of quiet submission. That is a well-established and widely shared way of reading this text.
In my opinion, it does leave some questions unanswered. If women are truly meant to be quiet in the church, how do we make sense of passages like 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul seems to assume that women will be praying and prophesying as part of public worship?
How do we make sense of the numerous women named throughout the New Testament who seem to occupy prominent leadership roles in the church? So as you might expect, I do have a different take on this part of the text.
For starters, the word translated here in the NIV as assume authority is notoriously hard to translate. It is not the typical word that Paul uses for authority, which is exousia.
[17:37] It is the word authentine. And depending on what version of the Bible you have in your hand, it's going to be translated differently with very different implications. So the NIV says assume authority.

The ESV and the NASB translate it as exercise authority. The Latin Vulgate and the New English Bible translate it as domineer. The Geneva Bible and the King James Bible say usurp control.
So you can imagine why there might be some disagreement because one person's looking at their Bible, another person's looking at their Bible, and you're going to go in two very different directions depending on the translation.
The confusion comes in part from the fact that this is the only time this Greek word ever shows up in the Bible. And the meaning of this word seems to have changed over time.
The same thing happens in English. If you look at the way certain words were used two, three hundred years ago, sometimes they almost mean the opposite of what they mean today. And the meaning of this word clearly shifted.
[18:38] Prior to Paul, it seems to have had very negative connotations. This word root was associated with murder and violence. Fast forward several hundred years after Paul was writing and it came to mean simply another synonym for exercising authority.

It's very hard to know exactly what Paul had in mind when he used this word in the first century. But what we do know is that any time an author like Paul uses a very unique word that is not the normal word he uses, it seems to imply he has a unique situation in mind.
So some people think this is a general prohibition against women teaching or exercising any form of authority in the church, while other people think that Paul is only forbidding women from doing a

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certain kind of thing, namely teaching in a way that asserts or presumes or usurps authority. authority. What you think about that is shaped in part by how you read the next verse. For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.
Again, is Paul referring to a timeless principle rooted in creation or something else? And here is where I believe, and I would submit to you, that the influence of the Artemis cult helps us understand what Paul may have in mind.
[20:01] The origin story of Artemis was massively influential in the Ephesian culture. Historical evidence shows us that her origin story, her birth story, was regularly celebrated through feasts, sacrifices, festivals, contests, music, acting, magic, sacred games, and birthday processionals.

It was rehearsed again and again and again. As the story goes, Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and Leto, and her twin brother was Apollo.
And when it came time for the twins to be born, Artemis was born first. I told you that one of the five most prominent titles for Artemis is she is first, because she was born first.
It then took hours for Apollo to be born. It was an extremely arduous, painful birth experience for her mother.
And Artemis had to help Apollo be born. So she became the midwife to help Apollo come into the world and saw her mother suffer for hours and hours and hours.
[21:14] So, because she was born first and because she was the one who had to help Apollo come out, that meant, in the mind of the first century followers, that she was the stronger one.

So she's first and she's stronger. Therefore, this justified the fact that the Artemis cult was led entirely by women, because women were seen as being spiritually superior, as Artemis was.
So, women lead in the temple because Artemis was born first and then Apollo. And because this birth experience was so awful, the myth goes that Artemis never wanted children of her own.
She essentially said, well, I don't ever want to have to go through that. And so she refused to marry, she remains a virgin goddess, and then she demands that her followers do the same.
So serious women who follow Artemis would also renounce marriage and abstain from having children. By the way, later in 1 Timothy, Paul refers and actually devotes a large section of his letter in 1 Timothy to women who have been led astray by the teaching of demons and have therefore refused to get married.
[22:28] He's like, we have all these women who have refused to get married. And then he has to give extensive instructions on how to deal with the apparently large number of unmarried women. And it's not just older unmarried women, it's younger unmarried women.

And he's like, how do we deal with all of these young unmarried widows? He has to address that. I think this is probably the reason. Also, as a result of the birth experience, Artemis became the goddess of midwifery.
So women who got pregnant and they were approaching their delivery date, they would pray to Artemis. They would go and they would buy spells. They would buy charms blessed by Artemis. And these were charms and spells of protection. And what were they praying for? They were praying that Artemis, that God, would save them through childbearing, deliver them safely through childbearing.
Right? And so they were used to, culturally, women were used to trusting in Artemis to deliver them safely through childbearing. So imagine you are a young woman, you have come out of the cult you grew up in of Artemis worship, you are getting to know this new sect called Christianity, the followers of the way, you're learning what it means to follow Jesus, you're going to church and your delivery date is fast approaching.
[23:47] And you're terrified of a situation like a breech child, right? C-sections wouldn't be invented for another 1,500 years or so. So you're terrified that if anything goes wrong, you could be in for a long, slow, horrible, painful death.

Childbirth was no joke, it's no joke now, it was definitely no joke then. And so you're trying to figure out who do I trust, who do I rely on? You know that Artemis is easily offended, you know that Artemis is vindictive, you know that Artemis with her arrows is just as likely to euthanize you during childbirth as she is to save you through childbirth.
And you do not want to get on Artemis' bad side. And you go to your pastor and you say, what do I do? Because I'm really afraid that Artemis will get revenge on me if I don't trust her like I did with my

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first two children.
What do I do now that I follow Jesus? Right? This would have been a very real scenario that people had to navigate. So here's the way I believe we are meant to read this passage. And I offer this knowing that there are some people who disagree with humility and respect for you.
As we said already, apparently the presence of women caused a lot of disruption. The Jews would have been put off by the fact that the women are sitting right next to them and that they're studying the word alongside them.
[25:04] The former Artemis worshipers and Greeks would probably have been confused about the fact that women weren't up front leading. Why is this movement largely led by men?

And there may even have been women who came from the Artemis cult who had previously served as priestesses. And they assumed that in this religious context they would be welcomed to go up front and lead.
So Paul is having to address this very mixed audience. And so he says this, and I'm paraphrasing, you should let, and in fact if you want to translate it, the best translation is I am not permitting. Right? So we'll get there. He says first of all, let women learn, let women learn God's word and when women learn God's word they should do so quietly with a posture of submission to God's word.
So he's saying to the Jews, no, let women learn. And when they do it they should do it with a posture of quietness and they should submit themselves fully to what they're learning. But then he says essentially this, but hey, just because I'm allowing women to study scripture don't assume I'm not necessarily permitting or I'm not necessarily allowing women to teach in ways that assume authority simply because they're women.
[26:16] So now he has the Greeks in mind. He's saying, yes the women are here learning but that doesn't necessarily mean that we're putting them up front right away. Because, he goes on to say, unlike the origin story of Artemis being born first, in the Christian origin story, let me remind you, Adam was created first, not Eve.

And let me remind you again, Eve was the one who was deceived. So don't assume that women should be up front just because they're women. Women are not necessarily more qualified to lead simply because they're women. Their posture, because they're new to this faith, should be one of quietness and submitting themselves and learning God's word.
Because that's one thing that all of these women had in common. The Jewish women and the Greek converts, all of them were, for the first time ever, being allowed to study God's word. So most of them were unlearned and most of them needed to devote themselves to learning God's word before you could even answer the question of whether or not they should lead.
And so their posture needs to be one of submitting themselves to the word. And yet, I believe Paul goes on to say, he says, Eve was the one who was deceived, but I believe he goes on to say, but let us not remember, or let us not only remember Eve for the sin.
Eve's legacy is not limited to her role in the fall. She, through all the women descended from her, also participates in the redemption of the world through the gift of childbirth, which is an allusion, I believe, to the ultimate child who was born.
[27:43] Paul is alluding to the means through which God brings salvation to the world, namely the birth of Jesus Christ into the world to save it. Once again, reminding us that God in every way is superior to Artemis.

You no longer have to rely on Artemis to save you or deliver you through childbearing. We worship a God who is able to bring about salvation for the whole world through childbirth.
He alone is worthy of our trust. He alone is worthy of our worship. As I said before, if you want to ask questions or go deeper, come to the adult ed class next week at 9 a.m., I do believe that regardless of how we read this last section, there are overarching themes that do apply to all of us. So let me ask us all to reflect on this. Are we committed and passionate about the spread of the gospel? Are we passionate to see the gospel go to all people?
Are we committed and passionate about living lives that glorify and lift up the name of Christ above all other gods? I think that's the ultimate point of this chapter.
[28:56] So let me ask you this. Do you, do we, pray for all people to come to know Jesus? Do you spend time in your day, do you spend time on your own praying for all the people you know in your life who don't know Christ, praying that they would come to know Christ?

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Pray for all people. And then we should constantly be asking ourselves this question. Do we hinder the spread of the gospel in how we live, in how we treat one another?
You know, when people outside the church are looking at the church, our behavior, our conduct, the way we love or fail to love one another is probably the most powerful apologetic for the truth of the gospel that people see.
So when people around us and people in the broader culture are only willing to be friends with those who disagree, with those who agree with them politically and they're only willing to associate with people who agree with them politically, when that's the reality in the world, but then when those people look into the church and they see that in the church community, we're the kind of people who build strong bonds of friendship and love and service that transcend political division.
When people see that, we are holding Christ up as superior to the political God that is worshipped in so many other temples in the city.
[30:28] Whatever the 21st century equivalent of Artemis may be, right, that's one example. When we are doing that, people say, there's something out there more important than my political affiliation.

There's something that creates a foundation for a relationship that is deeper and stronger than our political affiliation. They're seeing there's a superior God out there. There's a superior way to order our lives.
When other people want to make more money so that they can spend more money so that they can get nicer and nicer things, and that's the motivation for all that they do, and then they look into the Christian community and they see Christians equally ambitious, striving to earn more money so that they can give more money away, you're seeing something else put on display there, right?
The watching world is seeing a different ethic, a different relationship to money. Like our gospel reading said this morning, you cannot worship both God and wealth, and they're seeing these are people who don't worship wealth.
These are people who worship something greater, something better, something truer, something more beautiful. They have a God that is far greater than the God I've been worshiping, right?
[31:42] This, I believe, is the central concern here. And you know, there may be some theological issues that good, Bible-believing, faithful Christians disagree on.

There may be some issues like that, and that is frustrating. Frankly, I think some of these issues may not be fully resolved until Jesus comes again. But I believe that the way we love one another, I believe the way that we treat one another across those lines of disagreement, I believe that that is a powerful apologetic for the gospel, arguably even more so than our ability to agree on every doctrinal issue.
And praise be to the Lord Jesus, when it comes to disagreement, the gospel is not an issue we disagree on. So because of the gospel, right, because we agree on that, right, regardless of what side of the various issues you occupy.
Our primary commitment, our primary commitment is to love one another and treat one another with mutual respects. And I say that to people on every side of the issue. And I will say what I've already said, I'll say it one more time.
I have changed my position on this particular issue. One of the things I most hate is when a person changes their mind and then immediately proceeds to denigrate those who hold to the prior position.
[33:03] I will not tolerate that for the sake of the gospel. So if there's ever a hint of that in anything I say or do, I want you to let me know. And if there's ever a hint of that anywhere in our community, we need to put an end to it.

Because our primary concern is that we don't hinder the gospel. It is that when people see the way we love one another and serve one another and they see the unity in our community, it compels them to ask, what makes all this possible?
And the answer is the gospel, which we believe is the best possible news meant for all people. So let us pray and live in ways that make that happen.
Let's pray. Our Lord in heaven, we thank you. We praise you. We lift your name on high. And we pray that in everything we pray and everything we do, Lord, we pray that your gospel would go forth.
Lord, we pray that the hope of Jesus, that the name of Christ would be exalted above every other name. And we know that that will happen, that one day this city will be known. One day this city will

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be known as part of the New Jerusalem where your name is lifted above every other name, where you are the source of light and life, Lord, and you alone.
[34:23] And until that day, Lord, may we be faithful witnesses of your gospel. And we pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

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