

We are continuing our sermon series on 2 Timothy. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the pastoral epistles, or letters. Paul writes them to instruct fellow pastors. However, these letters aren't only for ministers. Ministry at the local congregation is an all hands on deck kind of thing. As we go through our series, we will be discussing the who, how, what, and why of Gospel outreach on the local level. Last week we discussed the who. Who? You! God's chosen people, drafted from before the creation of the world to serve in Jesus' army.

This week we're going to talk about the how. Our series is titled draft, and each week we're exploring a different sense of the word draft. Last week we talked about a military draft. This week we're going to the farm. Draft: not just a beast of burden. We will be revolving around the image of a draft horse. A draft horse, as opposed to a racehorse, is built to plow fields or pull carts. They were the farm muscle before the likes of John Deere, J.I. Case, and Massey Ferguson largely replaced them with tractors. To fine tune our question to our theme, how can a Christian pull the weight of the ministry?

First, 3. A Christian ministers through the grace of Christ (v. 1). Paul writes to Timothy in verse 1, **“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,”** The starting point for Christians is that Christ has already done it all for us, and we are of no account.

As we circle back to the image of a draft horse, we read this detail from the Internet Science Page, Wikipedia: “There are a number of breeds of draft horses, with varying characteristics, but all share common traits of strength, patience, and a docile temperament which made them indispensable to generations of pre-industrial farmers.”

God calls Christians to be strong, patient, and docile, that is, willing to accept the guiding of the Holy Spirit. When we look in the mirror, that's hardly who stares back at us. We are weak, but I'm not just talking about how far you can drag a sled. We are weak spiritually. We easily fall prey to pet sins. We deny our Lord at the first sign of trouble. We doubt the promises of God.

We are impatient. We want the desired changes to happen in our lives, in the lives of our families, and the lives of country to have happened yesterday. Failure easily discourages us, and we fall victim to the lie that things will never change.

We are wild. I'm not just talking about crazy nights on third street or at a house party. We are unable to be tamed or subordinate ourselves to someone's correction. This wild attitude is summarized in the statement: “I am the only one who knows what's best for me, and nobody can tell me what to do.” This sinful pride can be as prevalent in the toddler who insists on making his own breakfast as it is prevalent in the ninety-year-old who refuses to listen to advice and receive help from her adult children.

Apart from the grace of Christ, we are wild animals, and as our congregation of hunters line their sights and clean their rifles for next month, we know that wild animals are not fit for labor but are better off dead.

But the grace of Christ strengthens us for service in the Lord's Church. The Bible shows us a picture of draft horse Jesus, if you will. We see a Jesus who is patient, walking with sinners to the very end saying, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" We see a Jesus who is docile, willing to subordinate Himself—never to Satan and his schemes—but always to His Father and His plans. As He prayed just moments before He would be arrested, "**saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'**" Nonetheless, we see a Jesus who is strong. Strong to resist Satan and his temptations. Strong to overcome the trickery of the religious elites. Strong to take your sins to the cross and bury them once and for all.

Through our identity as baptized children of God, through the Word of the Gospel transforming our lives, through the very body and blood of Jesus in the bread and wine of communion—through *this* ministry of Word and Sacrament, the grace of Christ strengthens us, domesticating us not only for life with one another, but for life in the house of God. The good news of Jesus dying and rising again for sinners turns aimlessly wandering wild stallions into work horses who are well-fed and ready to be kingdom movers.

How can a Christian pull the weight of the ministry? The first point is simple. They actually have to be a Christian! If an untamed female horse stumbles onto your farm one evening, you can't just hitch her to a plow and get going. That'd be a real nightmare! The first step is always strengthening God's people through the message of the Gospel transforming their lives.

Second, 2. A Christian ministers with a team (v. 2). In the early days of steam engines, engineer James Watt did some experimenting. How much power can an average draft horse output in a day of work? One horsepower. His selling point was that one steam engine could do the work of dozens of horses.

This is course is where our analogy breaks down. There are no steam engines of church work. Trust me, if we discovered one, we'd be famous. Yes, a congregation can hire out certain tasks such as lawn mowing, bookkeeping, and event catering. However, there are no congregations without Christians.

Back in the olden days if you had a job that required lots of horsepower, what did you need? More horses! In this same vein Paul encourages Timothy saying, "**and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.**"

What Paul is talking about here is Timothy raising up fellow men to work alongside him in the ministry. We see this today as pastors nudge boys toward this high calling. We see this today as church leaders encourage men and women to

train to be Lutheran school teachers and deaconesses. We see this in the millions of dollars we pour into running our church body's two seminaries. We do all of this because the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

But this isn't just about ordained pastors and commissioned workers such as DCEs, teachers, and deaconesses. All pastoral ministry is team ministry. The only variables are: how many people are there, and are some of them getting paid?

As a pastor I am on a team with other paid workers: a custodian, organists, and a church secretary. I am also on a team with countless volunteers who dedicate their time and talents to the ministry that is done here. I'm not the farmer holding the whip, I'm a draft horse pulling the plow alongside you saints at Faith Lutheran Church & Student Center.

This congregation would not exist without the help of many volunteers both those who are currently serving, or who have served. How grateful we can be for the men and women who helped found this church in the 50s, those who kept it running throughout the 20th century, and those who have come onto the scene as we have reached the 21st century.

Every October we have church elections. Thankfully in my time they have not been as heated and contentious as the political elections in which we will be voting in November. Next Sunday, I invite you to attend the voters' meeting at 10:15. You don't have to run for a position. You aren't going to be broadsided with a floor nomination. Simply attend and see that even in a voters' meeting, God is entrusting the work of the ministry to faithful men that souls may be saved and built up in the Coulee Region. The draft horses are pulling the plow inch by inch to prepare for the harvest, even if the first seed hasn't yet been sown. This might be a crazy thought, but could we not see Voters' Meetings as celebrations to reflect and rejoice on all the work Jesus is doing in this place?

Moving along, 1. A Christian ministers wearing blinders (v. 3-10). **“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”** We see Paul then goes on with several analogies: a soldier cannot get caught up in civilian affairs. An athlete has to play by the rules. A farmer gets the first fruits of his crop. **“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel,”** Paul then goes on to talk about his sufferings and his chains.

The work of the ministry is hard. Coming to church means no late Saturday nights. Being involved with a board or committee means meetings and volunteer work, especially on Saturdays, the one day of the week you get to sleep in. Beyond the work, let's not mention the clientele. You have to put up with a sinful pastor who doesn't always do things the way you would like. Sometimes the fellow members at Church aren't always what you want them to be. They're flawed and sinful also acting more like selfish wild stallions than trained draft horses.

How can a Christian pull the weight of the ministry? By putting on blinders. Draft horses often wear blinders that don't let them see to the side. They do this so they don't get spooked or distracted but can keep their eyes to the prize. Likewise, Paul instructs Christians to have this same tunnel vision. That doesn't mean simply put your head in the sand to abusive situations at a congregation or tolerate unbiblically sinful pastors and leaders. However, it does mean you are going to be working with imperfect people, so stop looking at others and keep your eyes on Christ.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

In the Lutheran Confessions we read: “In all families and communities harmony needs to be nurtured by mutual responsibilities, and it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless people overlook and forgive certain mistakes among themselves. In the same way, Paul urges that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear with (if need be) the crude behavior of the brothers [and sisters], and to overlook certain minor offenses, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and lest enmities, factions, and heresies arise from such schisms” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, Paragraph 232).

Draft: not just a beast of burden. As we go forth as God's people transformed by the grace of Christ, we work alongside each other to accomplish the work of the ministry. We look not at others' faults and foibles, but we keep our eyes on Christ, knowing that with Him the burden is light, and we can endure hardships and sufferings as we do the work of His Church. **THROUGH THE GRACE OF CHRIST, CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IS A JOY TO PASTOR AND PEOPLE, NOT A BURDEN.**