

It All Adds Up

Psalm 137 & 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Rev. Jo Ramsey, October 6, 2013, **View From The Ancient Pew** Series #4



One day a traveler was walking along a road on his journey from one village to another. As he walked, he noticed several monks tending the ground in the fields beside the road. One monk lifted his head and greeted the traveler. The traveler nodded hello, and stopped. "Excuse me," he said, "do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Not at all," replied the monk.

"I am travelling from the village in the mountains to the village in the valley.

I'm wondering if you know what the village in the valley is like?"

"Tell me," said the monk, "What was your experience of the village in the mountains?"

"Dreadful," replied the traveler, "to be honest I'm glad to have left. I found the people most unwelcoming. When I first arrived, I was greeted coldly. The villagers kept to themselves--- they didn't take kindly to strangers. In fact, they never let me feel part of the village no matter how hard I tried.....

So tell me, what can I expect in the village in the valley?"

"I am sorry to tell you," said the monk, "but I think your experience will be much the same there".

Dejected, the traveler hung his head and walked on.



A while later, another traveler journeyed down the same road and he also came upon the monk.

"I'm going to the village in the valley," said the second traveler, "Do you know what it is like?"

"I do," replied the monk "But first tell me - where have you come from?"

"I've come from the village in the mountains."

"And how was that?"

"It was a wonderful experience. I would have stayed, but I am committed to completing this trip. I felt as though I was a member of the family in the village. The elders gave me advice, the children laughed and joked with me, and people were kind and generous. I was sad to leave. It will always hold special memories for me..... And what of the village in the valley?" he asked again.

"I think you will find it much the same" replied the monk, "Good day to you".

"Good day and thank you," the traveler replied, smiled, and journeyed on.

What is your village like? What kind of traveler are you? I think our monk would say...It's all in how you look at things, your attitude, your expectations...



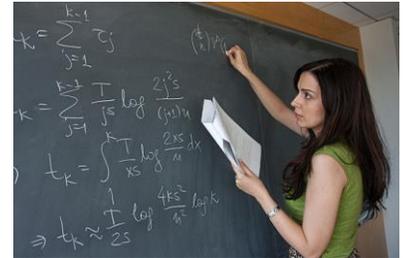


Seems like Timothy isn't feeling too positive about things in our passage this morning. He's having a bit of a crisis of confidence. He's lost his nerve. The wind has gone out of his sails. He was in tears when he and Paul last parted.

In fact, Timothy's tentative nature seems to present an ongoing struggle. In 1 and 2 Timothy, you will find no less than 25 different places where Paul encourages Timothy to get it together, stand up and be bold. Paul knows Timothy tends to look on the negative side of things.

Today, we're going to look at God's Word as a sort of heavenly equation. We're going to think in terms of addition and subtraction, positives and negatives. God's arithmetic, we'll call it.

Let's see how Paul approaches things. First things first, he draws Timothy's attention to the positive. He begins filling in the positive column. First, he reminds Timothy that God loves him. Then he says I'm grateful for you too. There are two positives-- you are special to God and to me.



Then, Paul goes on to remind Timothy of two more assets -- the women who raised him, nurtured him in the faith. Lois, Eunice...two more ticks in the plus column.

Then, Paul asks Timothy to recall his own faith experience, when he received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

With each of these reminders, Paul adds a layer of encouragement, building Timothy up. Like Psalm 145 says, "God opens his hands and we are filled with good things." These are all the things God gives us...His own unconditional love, the love of friends, faith, handed down from family or passed along to us in some other way. And, our own experience of God, whatever that may look like.

Count those in your favor, Paul says. They all add up. And taking an inventory is a good way to get started.

But, Paul doesn't just do addition in the spiritual equation. He sees the benefit in subtraction, too. Or perhaps it's better to say, he reminds us of something that should not factor into our spiritual equation. FEAR!



$$-4 \times 10$$

$$-4 \times 10 = (-40)$$

negative time positive = negative

Paul says, God has not given you a spirit of fear. Don't add it, and if it attaches itself to you, subtract it. Fear is negative, and according to the rules of multiplication, when you multiply a positive by a negative, you will always get a negative outcome.

I spoke a good deal about fear in the past, so I won't belabor the point. Fear is not necessarily a bad thing. It can warn us that something is unsafe. It can energize us to respond to threatening situations. BUT, the spirit of fear is like a poison. "Fear is the darkroom where negatives are developed." Sometimes it creeps in – one drop at a time. Other times, it dumps over you like one of those big buckets at the waterpark. Woosh! The spirit of fear erodes your sense of self, fills you with noise and panic, eats away at your ability to enjoy life, or simply negates your trust



that life is good and that God cares. The spirit of fear is a darkness that lets the negative multiply. It is not from God.



Now comes to core of our passage, a verse worth memorizing! Three priceless blessings: "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

God gives us POWER! This isn't about power, as in power hungry or controlling. This is about power from God,



power for life, confidence, trust, authority. You can stand your ground, make your claim, knowing that God has redeemed you and stands with you.

God gives us LOVE! God is there, claiming you as his own, filling you with a strong sense of your identity and purpose. Not only are we loved by God, we are called to love one another. Listen to what 1st John says about God's love: "Beloved, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

(There it is again! Fear is not part of God's equation!!!)

Finally, Paul says that God gives us a SOUND MIND! The Greek word here has the idea of a calm, self-controlled mind. God steadies us, grounds us, centers us and fills us with peace, no matter our circumstances. Claim that promise the next time the spirit of fear comes stomping into your chest!



God has redeemed you, given you a message of hope and filled you with the authority to share it. All of this grace adds up, becoming a great and bountiful treasure! We worship a God that wants to add and multiply the positive; and subtract and divide the negative. He did that for Paul. He did that for Timothy. He does that for us!

Feels good, doesn't it? But, we cannot stop there. God also calls **us** to be part of the formula too! We need to practice and promote God's equation -- subtract the negative; and add the positive.

We can do that every day in little ways, in big ways, in our own lives, at work and school, and here at church. We can look at things from a different perspective, we can change the narrative, frame things in a new way.

- Instead of half empty, think half full.
- Instead of saying I've never done that before, say it's an opportunity to learn something new.
- Instead of thinking I don't like change, try let's take a chance.
- Instead of thinking 'I am falling apart,' think 'My heart is breaking open,'
- Instead of blaming, complaining, and pontificating, bite our tongues, look in the mirror and take responsibility for what we can do. Then do it!
- Instead of analyzing, criticizing and offering advice, show respect, practice humility and encourage one another;
- Instead of worrying, fretting and fussing about the ways things are, chart a path forward to the way things should be. Be part of the solution!



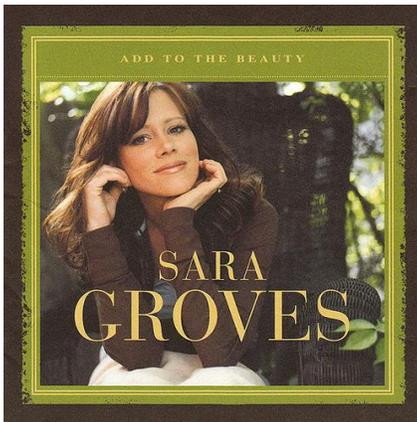
You've seen this familiar optical illusion, I'm sure. Is this an old witch or a beautiful, young woman? Keep looking and see if it changes. Changing perspective -- deciding to look at things from a more positive point of view -- reframing what has happened in terms of opportunity, **does not mean** being fake or burying your head in the sand. Everyone of us here has good reasons to be negative. Many of us have experienced a good deal of loss, some of it traumatic.... A lost job, declining health, a spouse with dementia, a relationship that didn't work out. This past Thursday marked 12 years since my mother died, and reminded me of my long list of losses that I like to recite occasionally.

The same goes for East Union, and the larger church....concerns about unity, the budget, people moving on. We have good reasons to be anxious.

I am the first to acknowledge that we need to voice our concerns, share our losses, and have the wrongs done to us acknowledged. But we cannot live there, in our wounds.

Shifting the focus from the past to the future doesn't mean forgetting who we are. Characterizing your own situation, or the status of life here at East Union, in terms of positives doesn't mean things are perfect, there are no problems, or challenges. Claiming and sharing God's Good News doesn't mean you don't see reality.

But, God doesn't want us to compound the negative, multiply the anxiety or divide the joy. He wants us to double up on hope, amp up our expectations, expand our horizons and add a new perspective... To live lives overflowing with power, love and inner peace.



Christian singer Sara Groves calls this **adding to the beauty**. In her song, Add to the Beauty, she sings,

We come with beautiful secrets
We come with purposes written on our hearts, written on our souls
We come to every new morning
With possibilities only we can hold

This is grace, an invitation to be beautiful
This is grace, an invitation

Redemption comes in strange places, small spaces
Calling out our best
And I want to add to the beauty
To tell a better story
I want to shine with the light
That's burning up inside

God has given us so much! He loves us and gives us people who love us. He gives us power, love and a sound mind. He casts out darkness and fear, and fills us with the light of Christ.

It all adds up to a treasure of grace, an invitation to be beautiful. So, this week ask yourself, will this attitude, this comment, this action, subtract or add to God's equation? What kind of village will you find on your journey?

May we all add to the beauty. May we all tell a better story!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

