

2 Tim 1:11 – “Preachers as Heralds”

A chapel by Dr. Jason Van Vliet

Sing: Psalm 96:6,8

Reading: 2 Tim 1:1-14

Sing: Hymn 84 all

This past summer I heard some preaching about preaching. At least part of the sermon was about how and why a minister should preach the Word. And in that sermon, the minister mentioned that preachers are *heralds*. And then he went on to describe that in the ancient world heralds might be sent from the battlefield back to the home front to announce a victory. And what a privilege, what a joy that must have been, for that herald to run back into the middle of the capital city and announce to all the citizens, and especially the anxious wives and mothers: “Hear ye, hear ye, our king and his loyal army have won the battle!” And, so the minister went on to say, preachers today, like the heralds of old have the privilege and the joy of announcing the victory that Christ has won.

It was not the first time that I have heard this comparison of ministers today and heralds of the ancient world. But it piqued my curiosity. What *exactly* did the herald of old (also known as the *kerux*) do? What position did he hold? What responsibilities did he have?

And connecting this with the text in front of us, why does the apostle Paul at precisely this point in this letter, call himself a herald (*kerux*)? Surprisingly, he does not do this very often. In fact he only does it one other time in 1 Tim 2:7, where he writes, again to young Timothy, “And for this purpose I was appointed *a herald* [a *kerux*] and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.” And that’s it. 1 Tim 2:7 and here in our text. The apostle Paul uses herald twice, and then Peter uses it once more to describe Noah as a preacher, or herald, of righteousness in 2 Pet 2 [v. 5]. And those are the only times that this particular word for herald (*kerux*)

is used in the NT. Three times in total. Which brings us back to the question, now with even more curiosity: why does the apostle Paul at *precisely this point in this letter* call himself a herald?

Well, it is all part of encouraging Timothy to be bold in his work as a minister of the gospel. You see, Timothy had *a sincere faith* (v. 5)—no problem there. In fact, this kind of strong, sincere faith could be traced back at least two generations in Timothy's family: both in his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. And Timothy had a gift from God (v. 6)—no problem there. God had equipped him with the ability to be a good preacher. And Timothy even had the laying on of hands (v. 6); he was duly and properly ordained. So everything seemed to be in place. There was only one concern: sometimes Timothy could be timid. Maybe more than sometimes. Maybe it was often, or almost all the time.

Like many of us, if not all of us, Timothy's timidity may have come from feelings of inadequacy. Like Moses, we are quick to ask: "Who am I?" and "Do I have what it takes?" However, there was something else. Verse 8 indicates that Timothy could also be ashamed. Look, there was persecution going on. Paul himself had been imprisoned, beaten, and almost killed on various occasions. And when the going got tough, Timothy did not always get going. Sometimes he shrank back: ashamed, embarrassed, maybe even just plain scared.

His father in the faith, the Apostle Paul, says, "Timothy, don't do that! Do not be ashamed! God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of *power*, and love, and self-discipline." And then as part of underlining and emphasizing all of this in the verses 9-12, Paul says "*I was appointed a herald....*" And since Timothy is called to follow in the apostle's footsteps, by implication, that means that Timothy must be a herald, too.

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But what exactly does that look like? What's a herald to do? As it turns out, much more than we might first expect. At the time the Apostle Paul wrote these words, the herald (*kerux*) was a royal, military and religious position, all wrapped up into one. Let's start with the *royal*.

A herald was not a person who was hired on the spot to deliver a message for the king. In that way, sending out a herald was not like calling up Fed-Ex and asking them to express deliver a package. No! Kings and princes had their own, full-time herald, if not heralds, in the plural. These men were specifically appointed to the position of *kerux*. They were *officially part* of the royal court. And if they were not busy bringing messages here, there or anywhere, then they would help out with other jobs that needed to be done: serving guests or harnessing up the horses for the king.

But when they went out on their main task of delivering messages, they took along a special spectre in their hand. This spectre made it clear to everyone that this was not just a travelling storyteller, this was not just a smooth-talking used-chariot salesmen, no, this man – with the spectre – he was a royal herald who came with a message, a message *with authority*, a message *from the king*.

In fact, as time went on, and the structure of the political system changed, not only kings, but also certain states, or civil assemblies, or we might say parliaments, hired their own heralds. There were heralds that announced games, such as the Olympic games. And there were heralds that announced festivals and feast days. There were even heralds that announced upcoming market days. Sports, feasts, and general merchandising: if the people needed to know about it, the herald made sure they knew it.

Knew about it, that is, *on behalf of the state*, or on behalf of the king as the case may have been. But always: on behalf of, in the name of, under the authority of someone else. You see, that's the one thing about a herald. He's not his own man. It's not *his* initiative. It's not *his* message. It's not *his*

event. The herald is the courier... but he's definitely not the crux of the matter. He's not the centre of attention.

Of course, the herald might well *feel* like he is the centre of attention. Because if he stands up, straight and tall, in the middle of the city square and he booms out with a loud, clear voice, "Hear ye... hear ye!" Well, now the whole crowd stops, looks at him, and listens. Dozens, even hundreds of people, are looking *at him*, wondering what *he* will say. And he is wondering how they will react. That's all well and true. But even though, understandably, he *feels* like he's the centre of attention, that is – most emphatically – not the case. It's not about the *kerux*, it's about the king who sent him.

Which is most comforting, and confidence building, for Timothy and for us. One of the biggest mistakes a preacher of the gospel can make, is to think – consciously or sub-consciously – that it's about him: *his* intelligence, *his* eloquence, *his* passion and *his* persuasiveness.

Yes, a preacher ought to put together a sermon that flows, logically from one point to the next. In other words, his logic and intelligence are involved in process, but they are not the crux of the message. *Christ and him crucified*, in other words, the cross is, literally, the crux of the message.

And yes, a preacher ought to phrase things well and express them in a memorable way. But all the eloquence in the world never produced an ounce of genuine faith. It's the gospel, and the hearing thereof, which – through the Holy Spirit – works faith in the heart of man (Rom 10).

And yes, a preacher ought to preach with passion and persuasion. But the object that needs to be moved and persuaded is something called the sinful human heart. And Scripture says that that sinful human heart is best compared to a stone (Ezek 11:19)—a big, hard, flinty stone. And Scripture adds that that heart needs to be regenerated. Not just moved, but rather re-moved and replaced with a heart of

flesh. And it's going to take a lot more than a herald's verbal persuasion to do accomplish that feat. It's going to take nothing less than the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit.

You see, it's not about the *kerux*. It's all about the King, Jesus Christ, and *his* gospel, and *his* Spirit. And the more convinced of this a preacher is the more confident he will be, when he steps into the pulpit.

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That is the herald's royal responsibility... what about ***the military and religious duties***? Heralds had a very important role to play on the battlefield, especially at the beginning and the end of these confrontations. When war loomed on the horizon, then it was often the royal herald who summoned the troops. And not only summoned them, but when the army – or at least the generals and the sergeant-majors – were all gathered together, then it was the herald who often led the pre-war assembly in prayer! Of course, in a pagan context, he would have been praying to the gods, the idols, especially the gods of war. But the point is: a herald had a special, religious function. In fact, there was even a special position called the *hiero-kerux*: the priest-herald!

And then, off they went to war, the generals, the majors, the soldiers, and the horses. And when the fighting was drawing to a close, and terms of peace or surrender had to be negotiated, then, once again, it was time for the herald to step to the fore. He was the one who went into the enemy camp – with his spectre – and he did the negotiations. There – in the midst of those tense talks – he had to represent his master: accurately, and loyally, and wisely. Obviously, the future of many lives and not a few livelihoods as well rested upon his shoulders. It wasn't always easy being a herald.

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Thankfully, brothers, even though ministers of the gospel today are heralds, they don't have to enter into tense negotiations with the enemy. There is no dealing with the devil! There are no consultations with the Ancient Serpent, or sin, or death. Because Christ, our king, has conquered them all, yes, the Apostle Paul says it even stronger: he has *destroyed* death (1 Cor 15:26). He has washed away all our sins. He has mortally wounded the Dragon, and the demise of the Roaring Lion is only a matter of time.

There are no terms of peace that need to be negotiated. There is only the Prince of Peace who deserved our celebration. And these are glad tidings of which we may be, and yes, we may aspire to be, heralds!

Sure, sometimes – like a Timothy – we're still timid. But when a herald becomes timid, he needs to stop thinking so much about the messenger, and start concentrating more on the message, the gospel. He needs to stop thinking so much about the messenger, and start focussing on the One who sends out the messenger: Christ the eternal King. After all, that's what being a herald is all about!