

Evangelization: Rally for the Gospel

When was the last time you attended an old-fashioned pep rally? When did you last hear a coach exhort a team to fight hard, play fair, and win the contest? At such times, if you are an eager athlete, the blood begins to stir, the heart pumps faster, and adrenaline rushes through the body to energize it for the game. The words motivate the team to pull together and to strain ahead for the victory. In the same way, the group of shorter letters found at the end of the New Testament serves a similar purpose. They act as a rallying cry to Christians—a rally for the Gospel.

The pastoral epistles (First and Second Timothy and Titus), many believe, were not written by the Apostle Paul himself (as they claim to be) but by a faithful follower of Paul who writes in his name and appeals to his authority. At the end of the first century, when most of the original followers of Jesus (including Paul) had already died, these letters were sent to early Christian communities, warning them and advising them to hold fast to the Gospel and to await the coming of Jesus at the end of time. In Second Timothy we hear a clarion call, “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus . . . proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching” (4:1–2). The same words might be addressed to us today!

It is not just the official leaders (priests, religious, and lay ministers) in the church who have the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel by word and deed. It is the responsibility of all Christians. But how do we proclaim the Gospel today? Are we meant to go to the nearest street corner and set up a soapbox or plastic crate and start to read from our Bibles? Some people do this, it’s true, but that is probably not the way for most of us. How do we proclaim the Gospel? First Timothy gives us a clue: “pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith” (6:11). In other words, live in a way that reflects the life and values of Jesus.

For many people today, that might mean choosing to participate in service projects that assist people in need: building houses with Habitat for Humanity, spending a summer in Appalachia, giving time each week to volunteer in a hospital, or offering to serve meals in a soup kitchen. The opportunities are endless for ways we can “pursue righteousness” today. The choices we make, in large and small matters, reflect the values we have embraced.

There are things to be avoided as well, choices that will lead us away from proclaiming the Gospel and the values it embodies. For the early Christians, there were temptations to empty teaching, to misguided factions, to the lure of wealth. Instead, Second Timothy urges “be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry” (4:5)—not bad advice even for today.

(This article is adapted from Barbara E. Bowe, RSCJ, Professor of Biblical Studies, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois.

The scriptural quotations in this article are from the New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms. Copyright © 1991, 1986, and 1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. Used by the permission of the copyright owner. All rights reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.)

