Trinity 3 –July 6, 2025
Text: 1 Timothy 1:12–17
Theme: All In

St. Paul is a Christian who is all in. In his epistle to Timothy, he tells us openly that he clearly sees what his old life was and what his new life in Christ is and what this new life offers him. Paul is not a person who wants to try to play on both sides of the fence. He is not a Christian of convenience, that person who is all about faith when it serves him to be so, but is careful not to burn any bridges with the world.

I think that is a function of maturity; not chronological or mental maturity, but spiritual maturity. The two are quite independent of one another. Chronological maturity just happens automatically. Every day we are de facto a day older. Mental maturity comes to those who consider their life experiences and choose to learn from them. Spiritual maturity comes to those who consistently feed their faith with God's Word and Sacrament. That's why it is not unusual for a child whose family has regular devotions and Bible reading to be light years ahead in their faith than a much older adult. Faith grows as it eats. Starve it and it will start to die. Feed it and it will grow beyond all expectation. When faith is well-fed and powerful, the desire to be "all in" on faith is strong.

If you remember, after he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus and was struck blind, St. Paul went off into Arabia for 3 years. During that time, he studied God's Word and through that study, his faith grew to amazing proportions and he returned all in. He says,

"…though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

St. Paul recognized that God had done something in him and he had been changed. But why had he been changed? That's the question many people never ask and that is why they don't appreciate what has been done to them. Do you know someone who was baptized and raised in the Church, maybe even confirmed in the Church, and has just walked away? They say that they just don't see any need for Jesus anymore, or at least they don't see that they need to grow in their relationship with Him. I would imagine that all of us know at least one person who fits that bill. Maybe you have talked to them and they get defensive. Maybe they have suggested that you should mind your own business. Why do they get so angry and defensive?

You know, I have never cared about watching sports on TV. For one thing, I don't care that much about sports in general but if I'm going to watch a sport being played, I want to see it live and I prefer to watch someone I know playing it. So, let's say that you love watching golf. Let's say that you are encouraging me to watch a big golf tournament that is going on and I say, "no thanks, I don't like watching golf." You then go on to list the many wonderful things that come from watching golf and I am unmoved. But I don't get angry with you. I don't list the things you refuse to enjoy. I don't storm out of the room and insist that you never talk about golf, refusing to ever come to any gatherings where golf might be mentioned!

But people who have wandered away from Jesus get angry because the law is written on our hearts and they know that they are wrong. They know that their failure to care for their faith offends God. There is a sinful reason that they are rejecting God, a selfish reason, an immature reason, but you're never going to hear it from them because they are like stubborn 3-year-olds holding their breath until they get their way.

The good news is that if they are defensive and angry, their faith is probably not dead. I've noticed that true unbelievers are rarely defensive about their position. They have no faith and

therefore, they have no guilt for rejecting God. Why would they feel guilty for rejecting someone in whose existence they do not believe? Do you ever feel guilty for hurting the tooth fairy's feelings by not putting your adult teeth under your pillow?

So, what do we do with a person who knows the law, refuses to do what the law commands, and feels guilty for his disobedience? Listen to St. Paul. He tells us why Jesus rescued him.

"But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." We were given faith to reflect the love of God for others. All we are is mirrors of God's love. We cannot argue people into following God. We cannot shame them into following God. It is impossible. You would have a better chance at getting me to sit on the couch and watch golf all weekend. It ain't gonna happen.

Look at the Gospel. The father can do nothing to get the son to return. We're not told of the father's sadness and anguish but we all know how we feel when people we love are making stupid choices. Now compound that with no communication and not even any idea of where the prodigal son was. I imagine the father was pretty upset. But God was working in his son. We have to be patient while

God works because He rarely works according to our timeline. All that time, God was working and the prodigal son finally came to his senses and returned to his father. And the father rejoiced and had a party in his honor. The law had worked on the son and now it was time to rejoice. Now it was time to bathe the son in love and build him up so that he might become a mirror of God's love for others. That's who we are. That's what we do. We are mirrors of God's love.

Now we can be like the older son and go off and pout because we didn't get all of Daddy's attention. We didn't get something we thought we deserved. I imagine there were some people who felt that way about St. Paul, a former Pharisee and persecutor who is now all of a sudden, a big shot missionary to the world. But I would rather be like St. Paul and the prodigal son. I would rather receive all the forgiveness of God and bathe in His grace and be a mirror of His love to the world. I would rather be "all in."