

The date was April 1886, and there was a train of rumbling from the east a long ways behind schedule. But it came to a stop in New Salem, which was one of its scheduled stops to take on fuel and water. And out of the train stepped down a tall, young man, a 27-year-old pastor named Friedrich Pfotenhauer. Most of us know him, of course, as the fifth president of the Synod, but in this time he was still a young parish pastor. And Pfotenhauer was on his way back to Minnesota from a trip out to Montana, because he had ridden the train out west to visit congregations that he had planted a couple years before, going as far west as Deer Lodge on the train. Of course, that was a pretty long trip, because from Odessa, Minnesota, where his parish was, out to Deer Lodge is a space of no less than 800 miles one way. But he had gone this way to encourage those congregations, as they were waiting for the first full-time traveling preacher to come and to serve them. So you can imagine that Pfotenhauer was probably pretty tired, wanting to get home back to his parish, back to the daily grind of things.

But when he stepped out of that train on that day in April, he began to ask around. Are there any Lutheran settlers in the area? And yes, he was told. There are some, in fact. They had come, and they had settled up here in Hannover. And so, he decided that he needed to go visit them. He didn't hesitate at all. And in fact, two men from Hannover were in New Salem that day getting supplies and selling some things. And so he decided that he would travel back with them to visit those who were here. And so once he found them--which wasn't hard to do. New Salem's never been that big.--he made ready to go. It wasn't part of his schedule. And I bet that when he stepped off that train he probably didn't think that he would find anybody here. But he went all the same, prepared to bring up the Word of God to the settlers here in Hannover.

But the journey north was not easy. It was April, after all, and it was chilly and it was muddy, the way that April usually is in this part of the world. And the men who had gone into New Salem had walked the whole way, because the roads were impassable. And so Pfotenhauer was ready to walk the nineteen miles that it took to get here to Hannover. He was totally ready to do it, but men didn't think it was right for the first pastor to visit them to do that. So they hired a pony for him in New Salem, and he rode at least part of time. And just to show you how difficult it really was, when they got to Sweet Briar Creek, about halfway in between here and New Salem, the creek was overflowing. It was filled with runoff. Pfotenhauer and two of the men who were with him, at least, made the jump, but a third man who had joined them fell in. And you can imagine how being wet and cold in that April would've been a danger to him. But he was still able to get to his home which was nearby and to warm up, so that there was no harm done.

But Pfotenhauer made here to Hannover, and the word went out quickly that a service would be held on the following morning. And so in a hut filled with people, Pfotenhauer preached the first sermon here in Hannover. He would come back in later years to do the same thing, until a regular preacher came in 1889. But he didn't count the cost. He was willing to come to preach the Word even despite great difficulties to himself.

And brothers, Pfotenhauer did that because he remembered the words spoken to another young preacher long ago, the words of St. Paul written to the young Timothy which we had in our reading for today. And Timothy also as a traveling preacher struggled with many things, not the least of which was the toil of travel. Because he didn't have a train in his day, obviously. He had to do everything on foot. He had to do everything by boat or maybe riding whenever he had the

opportunity. And what Paul said about himself in 2 Corinthians is almost certainly true of Timothy too. Paul said that he had to deal with "frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." Timothy had to deal with all of those things in his time, but he also had to deal with indifference, something Pfothauer also struggled with in Montana. Men being not interested in the truth, not caring about what God had to say. And all of it together was enough to discourage anybody. How are we supposed to carry out such an enormous task? How are we supposed to deal with these hardships and the indifference of men, especially when it costs us so much to do so?

But Paul pointed Timothy to Christ, calling on God as a witness to what he says. Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. And when he appears in glory, he will judge what each one has done, including the work that Timothy has been called to do. Keep that in mind, Paul says! Keep the Lord ever before your eyes, because he is the one that you serve. He is the one to whom you must answer. And the only thing that matters is what your Master has sent you to do and what your Master thinks of you. So knowing that, Paul says, preach the Word. Preach the Word when it is appropriate to do so. Preach the Word when it is inappropriate to do so. Reprove with the Word. Rebuke with the Word. Exhort with the Word. Preach the Word to all who are around you, even if they don't want to listen to you. Though some will not listen, preach the Word. Though some will turn away from the truth, preach the Word. Be sober-minded, keeping your Master ever before your eyes. Endure suffering, knowing that whatever you suffer in the service of Jesus, Jesus is worth it. Do the work of an evangelist, calling on all to believe in Jesus Christ. Fulfill your ministry, the ministry given to you by the Lord. Preach the Word as a good soldier of Christ, and when your Master appears, he will give you a crown which will never fade away.

And brothers, this is also what your Master calls to you today as well. Just as he called Timothy to preach the Word in his time, just as he called Pfothauer to preach the Word in his time, so he now calls to you to preach the Word in this time. Preach the Word fearlessly, knowing that you must answer to God. Preach the Word faithfully, whether men listen to you or not. Preach the Word ceaselessly, even when it seems inappropriate to do so. And keep your Master's command always before your eyes. Endure suffering, whatever it may be. Wear yourselves out in the service of Jesus. And fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith.

And whenever the task seems overwhelming, think back to those who have gone before you. Think back to Timothy and what he endured. Think back to Pfothauer and what he endured. Think back to all the pastors who once served here in North Dakota. How they endured long, sleepless nights. How they went on long journeys. How they in many cases very nearly froze to death. But they did so keeping their Master always before them. Because they knew that Jesus went with them. They knew that Jesus stood before them. They knew that Jesus would be their reward. And you have entered into their labors. Preach the Word as they once did, even if the world has forgotten them, because together with them, we will enter into the joy of our heavenly Master. Fulfill your ministry, brothers, as good soldiers of Christ.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have called us to preach the Word in season and out of season. Help us always to do what you would have us do, that we may be bold and fearless in our witness, so that we may carry out your calling in your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.