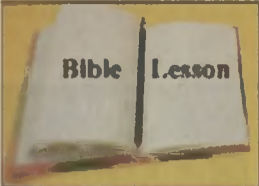


8B

RELIGION

Life 1B



God's strength and grace

1 Timothy 1:12-14

Today's passage opens with Paul giving thanks to Christ for having strengthened him. In addition, Paul's perception is that Christ sees him as a person of value because He met Paul where he was and employed him to build his Kingdom. Paul takes this opportunity to encourage Timothy by telling the younger man what Christ has done for him and by expressing gratitude. Paul is honest about what he was like before Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus. He describes himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent, ignorant man.

However, Paul says that, because of God's grace, he has received mercy and forgiveness instead of condemnation for the horrible things he has done to God's people. He is quick to admit his former behavior resulted from ignorance, regardless of the fact that he was a well-educated Jew. Paul was quite familiar with the law, for he had studied under a great teacher of the law named Gamaliel in order to become a Pharisee. Paul says that recognizing the astonishing mercy he has received has strengthened and encouraged him to face all the dangers and disappointment in his ministry.

Paul doesn't view his strength to serve the Lord as coming from his training or his own human abilities. He does not trust in his heritage as a devout Jew or his faithfulness in following the laws of God. Paul knows his strength is a gift from God, and it is only because of this gift that he is considered faithful and useful in service to the Lord.

Like Paul, we must realize our strength to serve comes from God. If we do not receive God's strength as a gift, we will not be able to withstand the challenges we will face as Christians. God's grace comes to us regardless of what our lives were like before we met Christ. It is not dependent upon the way of the world.

II. God's Strength Show the World His Mercy (1 Timothy 1:15-17)

Although the early Church did not have the New Testament in the form in which we have it today, they were not without God's truth of the Old Testament, which prophesied of their Messiah. Paul alludes to the Old Testament prophecy and Christ's fulfillment of Scripture in his letter to Timothy. Paul summarizes all of God's word by saying "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The early church was awakened to the understanding that, without Jesus dying on the cross and rising again, the whole world was without hope, despite what the Jewish leaders had taught them about keeping the Law of Moses.

Please see GOD'S/7B

A grand Martin Luther King Jr. celebration

Jan. 16 concert a collaboration between church, symphony



PHOTO/CURTIS WILSON

Members of the Community Choir practice at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church for the Daybreak of Freedom concert.

By Chris F. Hodges  
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The annual Martin Luther King Jr. holiday concert "Daybreak of Freedom," brings the community together.

The concert is a collaboration of Friendship Baptist Church and the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra.

Tony McNeill, minister

of music at Friendship and director of the Community Choir, said music is the best way to bring people together and to honor King's memory.

"Dr. King was a Baptist minister and music played an important role in what he did," McNeill said.

He will direct more than 100 voices from all walks of life at the Jan. 16 concert.

"There will be a wide variety of music," McNeill said. "There will be something for everybody."

That something, according to Richard Early, executive director of the Charlotte Symphony, includes traditional gospel music, classical music and renditions of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" and "We Shall Overcome."

"Music is one of the most

powerful mediums," Early said. "We are so pleased to have Tony McNeill working with us because he brings people together from other churches. Music speaks so powerfully to people."

This year, Harry Davidson, music director and conductor of the Duke University Symphony Orches-

Please see A GRAND/7B

Black churches celebrate the end of slavery

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE--The words and the voices rose softly at first, a few members of the choir celebrating the sweetness of freedom, 140 years of freedom for blacks in the United States.

"Oh freedom, Oh freedom," they sang with the organ, while, across the sanctuary of First Baptist Church, the celebrants grew more and more joyous, clapping their hands and raising their own voices in song.

"We have come here to declare our freedom in God," said Rev. Nathaniel

McFadden, pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church, as he opened the Freedom Worship Service, a gathering of area black churches celebrating the anniversary of the end of slavery in 1865.

Rev. Leroy Fitts, pastor at First Baptist Church for 33 years, organized the event about a month ago when he realized this year was the 140th anniversary.

"It dawned on me that we ought to celebrate (it)," he said. "We ought to have a national celebration."

Fitts plans to repeat the event next

year and hopes it grows to become a nationwide event. He wants to organize a major event in April 2010 for the 145th anniversary.

Drawing on the enthusiasm of the crowd of more than 100 people at the church, Fitts said, "We sound like some free people in here today."

He noted that the first African slaves landed in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. "They stayed in slavery for longer than we have been in freedom."

Celebrating the past has enabled black people, especially younger

Please see BLACK CHURCHES/7B

Christianity gets credit for Western freedoms

By Richard N. Ostling  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's one of history's most important questions: Why did Europe and North America embrace democracy and thrive economically while nations elsewhere suffered oppression and stagnation?

Leading U.S. sociologist Rodney Stark says many scholars purposely overlook the obvious answer: It was the spread of Christianity that made possible political and economic freedoms, modern science and resulting Western advancement.

Such is the Baylor University professor's contention in "The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capital-

ism and Western Success" (Random House), one of the more provocative of recent books, whose vigorous prose reflects the author's one-time employment as a newspaper reporter.

Though Western intellectuals downplay theology, Stark sees Christian beliefs as the key.

Which beliefs? He thinks the basis for the West's rise was "an extraordinary faith in reason" resulting from Christianity, which "alone embraced reason and logic as the primary guide to religious truth."

Faith in humanity's reasoning capacity, in turn, stimulated scientific theory-making, democratic theory and individual freedoms. Capitalism applied

this to economics, producing an explosion of wealth.

Over the past century, Stark writes, intellectuals have claimed the opposite, saying the West surged ahead by overcoming Christianity with its supposed barriers to progress, especially in science.

"Nonsense. The success of the West, including the rise of science, rested entirely on religious foundations, and the people who brought it about were devout Christians," Stark says.

He asserts that "real science arose only once: in Europe." Only in Europe did alchemy develop into chemistry and astrology into astronomy, with thinkers moving beyond

mere technology into true research.

Stark rejects the century-old scenario of Max Weber that Protestantism undergirded capitalism. Stark maintains that the main elements were invented by Catholic monks and lay Italians, centuries before the Reformation.

He also thinks it's high time to eradicate "an incredible lie that long disfigured our knowledge of history": the claim that between the fall of ancient Rome and the secular Renaissance and Enlightenment, Europe suffered through so-called "Dark Ages" of "ignorance, superstition and misery."

That's a "hoax," he says, Please see CREDIT/6B

N.J. teens arrested for plot to burn nativities

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAYREVILLE, N.J. — Four teens stole 27 baby Jesus statues from nativity scenes outside churches and homes and planned to burn them, police said.

Two of the suspects, who ranged from 15 to 19 years old, said they acted out of boredom, authorities said.

"They were looking for things to do," Detective Ken Kelly said. "They told us, 'We were going to have a baby Jesus burning party.'"

One suspect told detectives, "We just wanted to see their heads burning," Kelly said.

The suspects, who were arrested Monday, face charges of theft, criminal mischief, destruction of venerated objects and conspiracy, and could face up to five years in prison if convicted.

Robert Olson, whose 18-year-old son, Christopher, was charged, said he and his family were shocked by the arrest.

"Although Chris is sometimes misguided, this was not something we expected out of him," he said.

Olson said his son is unemployed and working toward resuming his high school education. The teen is on probation for a disorderly persons offense involving a disagreement with a neighbor, his father said.

"I hope my son and the others will come to grips with what they've done and make full restitution and get whatever help they need to get rid of those feelings," Olson said.

Frank Payne, whose 19-year-old son, Michael, also was charged, said bias was not a factor.

"Michael has been hanging around with the wrong people," he said. "He goes to college. He's an outstanding young kid."

Also charged were 18-year-old Nicholas Hess and a 15-year-old who was not identified due to his age, police said.



PHOTO/SHOPNBU.COM

CHURCH NEWS

The deadline for adding announcements to the calendar is noon on Fridays. Fax to (704) 342-2160 or e-mail cheris.hodges@thecharlottepost.com.

January 8

Carolina Voices will hold a special audition for singers for "Psalms & Songs of the Ages," the unprecedented concert planned for March 3 and 5, 2006, in collaboration with Discovery Place and The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit.

This concert will feature the world premieres of two choral works commissioned by Carolina Voices. Up to 20 persons from all voice parts will be added to the Festival Singers for this concert. Singer requirements: The ability to read music and blend with an ensemble, as well as a commitment to weekly rehearsals on Monday nights from Jan. 9 through Feb. 27.

Candidates are asked to sing a prepared piece of music of their choice that shows their

vocal quality, range and artistic expression. A piano accompanist will be provided. Individual auditions will take place beginning at 3 p.m. at Temple Beth El, Shalom Park, 5101 Providence Road. Call Carolina Voices, 704-374-1564, for an appointment.

January 15

Bethlehem Baptist Church, located at 4 Harrison Bridge Road, Simpsonville, S.C., will host a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. celebration at 4

p.m. The keynote speaker will be the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr.

February 12

The All For One Youth Choir will resume practices at 3:30 p.m. at Western Avenue Baptist Church, 1206 Museum Road, Statesville. New members will be accepted through Feb. 19. For more information call Bill Ward at (704) 876-0015.

