

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

### 1 Timothy 1: 12–17

Today and for the next two weeks, we are following Paul's first letter to Timothy. It is one of the so-called 'Pastoral Epistles'. There has been much debate about the authorship of these letters. Most scholars now think that they were not written by Paul himself, but by another writer at a much later date, perhaps some time around 100 AD.

However, although they were written in Paul's name, they are not to be considered 'forgeries'. Rather, using an approach which was common in the Greco-Roman tradition, the writer was trying to extend the thought of the original author—i.e. Paul – to the problems of a later time. Through them we learn a lot about the difficulties besieging the early Christian church and how best to deal with them.

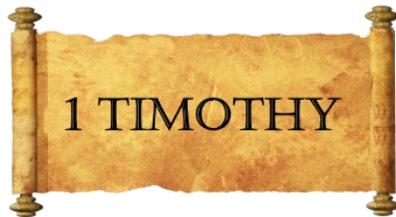
It is as if the author was saying: 'Had Paul been here, he would certainly have said this ...'

The author recounts the change in Paul's life since his conversion.

The focus is not so much on what he has done since then, but on the extent of the mercy and forgiveness God extended to him, a sinner and blasphemer. Ignorance is his excuse.

It is to be noted that Paul did not in fact change religion: he remained a Jew, but could now see the love and salvation Christ brought. If a person as bad as him could be saved, there is all the more reason for lesser sinners to accept Christ's teachings.

The author puts Paul's authority behind the phrase 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' which was probably taken from a profession of faith or hymn of the time as is the final phrase of praise to 'the Eternal King'.



ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH  
IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

### Gospel Luke 15: 1–32

This week's text contains three parables showing God's mercy towards sinners: that of the lost sheep; the lost coin; and the lost son – better known as the prodigal son. This last parable was also read on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, and background notes can be found in the Prego Plus for that week.

#### **Tax collectors and sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus**

These two groups would have been avoided and despised by Pharisees and Scribes. The tax collectors were known for their unethical behaviour, usury and fraud. They were working for the occupying forces. The Pharisees did all they could to avoid sinners in an attempt to keep themselves pure.

#### **The parable of the lost sheep**

Parables often have twists in the story to make the reader reflect and find deeper meaning. Here Jesus uses the parable to answer the Pharisees' complaints.

A shepherd would not be the owner of a hundred sheep; he would simply be looking after them, and so would certainly have incurred the wrath of the owner by leaving the majority of the flock unattended. A lost sheep would often refuse to move, so the shepherd would have to carry it over his shoulders, holding his legs together. This requires a measure of strength. In the figure of the shepherd (a job which in ancient times was often despised and at the bottom of the social ladder), we see God and his unconditional love for us. Like the shepherd, God is strong, ready to disregard general disapproval for the sake of one of his flock.

#### **The parable of the lost coin**

Jesus now uses a woman as the main character in his story. For his audience, this would have been scandalous. As we've seen before, Luke typically uses both sexes as the main protagonists in two consecutive stories.

Ten drachmas, representing approximately the wages for ten days' work, is not a large sum of money; the woman is clearly rather poor. She lives in a humble dwelling where the only opening is the door; there were no windows, hence the need for a light.

#### **There will be rejoicing**

In these stories we move from panic and anxiety to great joy. The celebration is not actually about having anything new; rather it celebrates rediscovery of what the person already had. In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coins, there is no actual repentance involved: the focus is on people searching and finding, which leads to rejoicing.