

## **2 Timothy 1:1-14 - 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

Many of us probably never knew what fear was until we became parents. Suddenly becoming responsible for another human being's life can make us extremely aware of all the ways that a tiny life could be put in danger. Parents want to protect their children – these amazing, beautiful, vulnerable little beings who are completely dependent on us – from anything that might hurt them. The responsibility for their safety and wellbeing can be overwhelming, especially when we see threats all around us in the world. Parenting can be a scary thing.

The Apostle Paul knew this feeling all too well, even though we have no evidence that he fathered any children of his own. Paul's concern was for the spiritual safety and wellbeing of those who had come to faith in Jesus Christ through his own ministry, and for the young churches they formed. He was worried about the possibility they might be led astray by false teaching, or become discouraged when their faith was tested. He fretted over their ability to withstand persecution. And so, to encourage these fledgling churches and their leaders, Paul wrote letters to them.

It was customary in the first century for letters to begin with a standard greeting and prayer of gratitude and blessing: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." This letter's prayer of gratitude describes the faith history of Timothy's own family: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, it dwells in you."

You might recall a grandparent sharing faith with you when you were growing up. These days, because extended families are scattered and children may only see grandparents a few times each year or two, the church often helps fill the role of grandparent, sharing stories and examples of faith from generation to generation. This is why we make a point, during the baptism of every child, to ask the sponsors and congregation: “Sponsors do you promise to nurture *these persons* in the Christian faith as you are empowered by God’s Spirit, and to help *them* live in the covenant of baptism and in communion with the church?” They respond with “I do.”

“People of God, do you promise to provide support for this child and pray for them in their new life in Christ.” And the congregation responds, “We do.”

But the church, like a grandparent, only plays a supporting role in training up children in the way they *should* go as stated in Proverbs. Parents are the first and best examples of faithful living, the first and best teachers of faith in children’s lives.

It’s in the home that children first learn how to say prayers at bedtime or before meals. It’s in those daily surprise conversations – you know, the ones that start with a deep theological question like, “Mommy, where does God sleep?” or “Why does God make mosquitoes?” – that children

learn what their parents believe about God, the world God created, and their place in it. This is how we pass on faith from generation to generation.

The letter to Timothy goes on to explain why this is so important, as it lays out the key truth of this passage.

*“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”*

In other words, because of the important role that Timothy’s mother and grandmother played in his growing faith, Timothy is to fan into flame the gift of faith that fuels his present ministry. “Paul’s reminder to Timothy to boldly cultivate and embrace his own current calling and ministry is because of, on account of, and rooted in the reality of Timothy’s initial exposure to the faith within the context of his family.

This is important for us, as well. Somewhere along the line, people got the idea that it would be better to expect the “religious professionals” to take on the full responsibility of raising up children in the way they should go. Parents lost confidence in their own ability to share faith with their children. Better to let the seminary-trained pastor do that job, they thought.

And this has been a great loss, not only to the children, but to their

parents. It doesn't take a seminary degree to teach children that God loves them, or to show God's love by the way we interact with our own families, neighbours, and communities. You cannot measure the joy of watching your own child come to faith through daily prayers and conversations about Jesus, and reading Bible stories and scripture together as a family. The home is where the priesthood of all believers begins its ministry.

So, rekindle the gift of God that is in you, and take heart! Parents and grandparents, you do not need to be afraid, "for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

To 'rekindle the gift' means to stir up the grace and faith and love that we have received, and we stir them up by putting them into practice ... Our call is to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to love as we have been loved.

*"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,*

*which is why I suffer as I do.”*

We live in a world where some are ashamed of the gospel. It isn't cool or hip to stand up for Jesus. This is where the faith that surrounds our children in the community of the church is so important. This is a place where it is safe, where standing up for Jesus is affirmed. This is the place where children learn how to tell the story of Jesus and learn to live into their own calling as followers of Christ. This is where we learn how to keep the promises made on our behalf at our baptism – to renounce sin, to believe in Jesus, to live our faith each day in ways that others see the light of Christ through us.

The letter continues, *“for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. Because we know whom we have believed and to whom we have committed everything, and we trust him to be faithful, we can continue to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us. Following sound teaching and staying connected to the family of God, we guard the good deposit of faith that has been entrusted to us, and we teach our children how to do that, too.”*

We have each been called to a holy purpose, just as Paul and Timothy

were. We have each been given a family of faith to help us remember key truths and avoid being drawn away into false doctrines. It is this family of faith that helps us guard the good deposit of faith we have been given. And faith is a gift – we cannot manufacture it on our own, we cannot create faith by ourselves. We can only exercise the faith we've been given, to strengthen it and deepen it as it grows within us.

We each have been called with a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus. We each have been given the faith to answer that call. It is good to remember that, to reaffirm our call from time to time.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, developed a prayer for use in services for the Renewal of the believer's Covenant with God. Wesley didn't claim to have written the prayer. He adapted it from other sources, and no one knows who actually wrote the first version of it.

Even though the words of the original covenant prayer are lost, they are thought to be reflected in the Directions for Renewing our Covenant with God which Wesley issued as a pamphlet in 1780. These directions were intended for services to be held regularly in the church, usually around the time of the New Year. A few years ago, in the Eastern Synod, each congregation signed a covenant agreement between the congregation and synod.

But what better time to renew our covenant with God than on a day when we have witnessed parents, sponsors, and the congregation enter into that covenant on behalf of their children? These are the words John Wesley used to introduce the Covenant Prayer:

*“...Christ has many services to be done. Some are easy, others are difficult. Some bring honor, others bring reproach. Some are suitable to our natural inclinations and temporal interests, others are contrary to both... Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.”*

And so I invite you to join me, as we renew our covenant with God together - something we might consider.

Sometimes it is helpful to be reminded of the faithfulness of others, and here we see some are suffering in their faithfulness to the gospel, confident of God's faithfulness. We are encouraged to develop and use spiritual gifts and callings effectively. Consider what God has gifted you and try to find ways to use it for his glory. This could be through serving in the church, volunteering in your local community or exploring training or educational opportunities that you find interesting and challenging.

You can better understand who God made you by exploring and reviewing your spiritual gifts and calls. These abilities can have a greater impact on church, community, and personal settings. Believe in sound doctrines with faith and love. We need not be ashamed of the gospel despite suffering, tribulations, and persecutions, because it is the power

of God to save lives. Persevere in prayer every day, giving thanks to God and interceding for your family, friends, and neighbours.

Paul reminds Timothy not to be ashamed of Paul or the gospel. Timothy may have been ashamed of Paul because he was imprisoned. But what does it mean not to be ashamed of the gospel? There are several meanings for the word ashamed. It can mean being reluctant or unwilling to do something because of shame or embarrassment. It can mean to be unwilling or restrained because of fear of shame, ridicule, or disapproval. In Paul's day, the fear of shame, ridicule, or disapproval was understandable, considering the possible outcome. After all, Paul was in prison. But what does that mean for us today?

Are we ashamed of the gospel? Are we afraid of being ridiculed, ignored. Does disapproval stand in our way of sharing the gospel? Are we afraid of stepping on the toes of those who disagree with us or are of another faith or belief system? Of course, we are not comfortable walking up and down our neighbourhood proclaiming the gospel as they did in Paul's day.

Many years ago when we were teaching Grade Six Sunday School classes, we had a group of travelling youth entertaining the Sunday School students with some skits. One of the skits had a supposed Gospel proclaimer standing on the corner and inviting converts or believers. The so-called "evangelist" would stand on the corner, hit the



listener over the head with a rolled up magazine or newspaper yelling “I’m an Evangelist.” I don’t think that any of us would care to spread the Gospel with such methods.

2 Timothy was Paul’s last letter before his martyrdom at the hands of Nero. Paul encouraged Timothy to stay committed to Christ’s Mission with urgency. He stressed the importance of perseverance, sound doctrine, and scripture. This was Paul’s last written document. He had done everything that he could for the Lord. He faced the prospect of brutal death. He had fought the great spiritual battle and run the marathon spiritual race of faith. The Christian faith is a super marathon relay race. Paul passed the gospel baton to Timothy who in turn would pass it on to the next generation.

The Gospel baton has passed from generation to generation for 2,000 years and is now in our hands. Our duty is to pass the Gospel baton to the next generation for them to carry and pass it on to the next. We are to pass the gospel baton of faith to our children and our children’s children, by teaching, encouraging, conviction, correcting, and training them in godly and righteous living. We should never drop the baton that is in our hands!

*Heavenly Father, help us to hold firmly to sound doctrines with faith and love. Help us not to be ashamed of the gospel, because it has the power to save lives. Help us give thanks to you every day in prayer and intercessions for our families, friends, and neighbours, near and far. In Jesus' name. Amen.*