

2 Timothy 1:3-10
Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 19, 2022

The Lord has a way of getting us to think. It may happen while recuperating from a broken leg, time in the hospital or other down time. Maybe it came while isolating during the pandemic or in retirement when time was on your hands. We remember important matters from the past. We ponder the future. Such times of reflection can be beneficial.

I pray that you will never have the reason that the Apostle Paul had to experience the thinking time that produced this text. He was in prison—again—awaiting trial and he expected it would result in his execution. Christianity was at that time illegal in the Roman Empire and spreading it was a capital crime, punishable by death. As he looked to that likely future his thoughts went to Timothy, his young co-worker, who would succeed him in much of his work. He encouraged Timothy with words we can apply to our lives.

FAN THE FLAME OF FAITH

- I. Faith passed on to you
- II. Faith based on Christ Jesus

The flame of faith had been passed on to Timothy from his family. The Apostle recalled Lois and Eunice, his grandmother and mother. They were faithful believers who modeled and taught the faith consistently. Later in the letter Paul would mention that Timothy had known the holy scriptures from infancy. He had been raised on them. They were an integral part of his life. Those ladies taught him to fold his little hands in prayer, told him Bible stories and sang psalms with him. He would have thrilled at hearing of the exodus or of David defeating Goliath or Daniel in the lions' den, just as we remember hearing in childhood. Paul had a similar past as he mentioned his forefathers. They knew of and awaited the Messiah. It is true that he hadn't realized the fulfillment in Jesus when it occurred, but his training had been thorough.

What about Dad? Timothy's father was a Gentile and did not share biblical faith. As a result Timothy had not been circumcised on the eighth day of life like God had instituted for Jewish boys. Out of consideration for the feelings of others he had it done before joining Paul on mission journeys. The lack of the fatherly influence and support reminds us of the important role that fathers have in the spiritual development of their families. Studies have underscored the impact of

Dad's example and participation in church activities upon children and their continuing in the faith, even more than that of Mom. We give the reminder to dads and grandpas to do more with your kids than play ball, go hunting or teach mechanical skills. You have a vital role to fulfill as the spiritual leader in the family. God will bless your family through you. Also give thanks this Father's Day if you had a dad who provided a foundation of faith in your life.

Faith is also passed on through the church. Paul had a role in Timothy's past. He viewed him as a son in the faith. He mentioned it here: "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." The laying on of hands had occurred when he was commissioned as a co-worker, but Paul's teaching had previously provided both spiritual growth and ministerial training. A bond had developed between the two. "Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy." Those tears had likely been shed at their last contact as Paul bid farewell to his friends from Ephesus. He desired another meeting before he met death, but it was uncertain whether that wish would be granted. Thus he was writing this last letter.

We see the concern also as Paul revealed, "Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers." Christians care about one another. A pastor prays for the people he serves and they reciprocate with prayers for God to guide and support him in his work. The Lord answers those prayers for their mutual benefit.

The Apostle knew the challenges that would await Timothy. He could face the same prospect of death now looming before himself. Paul noted, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." In the face of opposition it would be easy to become afraid and so to hide one's faith and go with what is popular. That would benefit neither himself nor others. Such fear is not necessary. Remember Pentecost? With boldness the disciples spoke "the wonders of God" as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. He would enable the same with Timothy. Here Paul assured him of such power from God. He also mentioned love, which seeks the welfare of others and acts kindly toward them. In love for his Savior he could treat those he served in the name of Jesus with caring concern for their souls. What is translated here as "self-discipline" comes out in other versions as sound judgment or sensibility. It is knowing and doing what is right, showing common sense. He was not to be deterred by the situation Paul faced, that is, not be ashamed of his being imprisoned. Follow his path of faithfulness. Hold to the teaching of Jesus as he had been taught.

These are words for us to take to heart. We call the letters to Timothy and to Titus "pastoral epistles" but they benefit more than clergy. Each Christian has a ministry and calling from God. First we are called to faith and then motivated to share it. Remember and emulate faithful grandparents, parents and others who have played a significant role in your faith life. They brought you to the Lord in baptism, then followed up with training in Sunday School or Christian schools. There may have been a teacher who especially impacted your spiritual life. Or a pastor that connected with you. As I have visited with several of you over these past months, each has related memories of different servants of the Lord in the history of St. John's and the impact they had on you. That's why a periodic changeover is good (although we would like the next one to happen sooner than it has). Recall those lessons you have received and continue learning to fan the flame of faith that these Christians have passed on to you at home and at church.

II.

Faith is more than a family or institutional tradition. The content of our faith is the key. We have a faith based on Christ Jesus. It was planned already in eternity. God knew the outcome of the world he would make and the people he would put in it. They (we) would blow it with sin. He still loved us and planned the solution. He would send his Son to rescue the world by living and dying as our Substitute.

He also planned our individual connection. He chose you to be his own. We call that our eternal election. Happening then, it was not based on our performance or character. We weren't around yet. God foresaw us in love. It was his grace, totally his doing.

The eternal plan God made he carried out in time. There was the work of Jesus. We reviewed that work during the festival half of the church year. God sent his Son, the promised Savior, as a human being by the miracle of the virgin birth. The God-man Jesus lived a holy life in obedience to God's commandments in thought, word and action. He did what we failed to do as we have disobeyed God and as we say and do things that hurt or disrespect those around us. Jesus shouldered the misdeeds, cruel words and improper thoughts of everyone who ever lived. Each sin we committed deserved an eternity of suffering in hell. Jesus paid for them on the cross as he suffered the agony of being forsaken by his Father, instead experiencing the full fury of his anger over sin. He endured the entire penalty. He announced its completion with his call from the cross, "It is finished," and demonstrated it by rising to life on Easter morning.

The text reported what he accomplished: "(He) destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Rising from the dead was not just for

himself or to announce his victory. Because he broke death's chains we will follow him in rising. The grave cannot hold us. We pass through death to life or have immortality. That term means "not dying" or more precisely, "not being destroyed." Instead we will live forever in heaven with our Savior in glory. The Lord has revealed those precious truths to us through the gospel, the good news of Jesus. That message is shared with us in the Word and in the sacraments in our worship and in our home life as we described earlier.

The faith thus planted and fed has an effect. Paul noted we have been "called to a holy life." We live in God's ways in response to his goodness, as a thank you to him. We are not trying to earn credit before God or to save ourselves, as we already have all that is needed through Jesus. We strive to follow the ways of his will, honoring and obeying him. We put him first in our lives, giving him credit for all that we share. We will be bold and not ashamed of our faith. The wise people of this world may mock our simple faith and challenge our beliefs, but we will continue steadfast in faith. To do so we do not rely on our own power or we would surely fall flat on our faces. Fanning the flame of faith means using the Word we have been taught, reading and studying it for growth and for the powerful effects it has on ourselves and the bold confession of faith it produces, as well as the blessing that occurs when we bring the good news to our family and friends. Know and share the Savior.

At the outset I referred to time for thinking, but we are talking about more than mental exercise or nostalgic musings. As we recall those who passed on the faith to us and as we appreciate the work of Christ Jesus, we will maintain the faith and pass it onto others for their good and to God's glory. God bless you as you do so.