

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
November 1, 2020
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV
2 Timothy 1:3-14

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” (2 Timothy 1:5 N.R.S.V.)

Timothy

Hi there. My name is Timothy. Today I want to share with you from a letter that I got from my Uncle Paul. Well, he isn't really my uncle and most people know him better as the Apostle Paul. Perhaps I should explain.

I grew up in the mountains of what is now modern day Turkey in a little town called Lystra. My mother Eunice was a Christian as was my grandmother Lois. I was a young man when I first met Paul. He was so full of fire and conviction. He opened my eyes to the goodness of God and to the grace and salvation that is available to all through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was there for my baptism into the faith and we just clicked from the very beginning.

Because Paul baptized me and nurtured me in the love of God, he regarded me as his child in the faith and he treated me like the son he never had. Still, I could never bring myself to refer to him as my father. I felt like that would be disrespectful to the father I already had. My biological father was a Greek intellectual who could never bring himself to believe in Jesus. In spite of that, he and my mother got along well and he was good to me. So I didn't want to call anyone else “Father.”

Your scriptures never mention this, but I liked to refer to Paul as my Uncle Paul. When we were getting along well, which was most of the time, I sometimes shortened that to “Unc.” Like I said, “Unc” and I clicked from the very beginning.

When we were butting heads, and sometimes we did that too, I called him “Ug.” He could be stubborn and somewhat overbearing. He could be a real pain, could good old Ug.

I really did have the greatest affection and love for Uncle Paul. He not only baptized me. He was my mentor in the ministry. So back to this letter he sent me.

This was the second of such letters that he sent me. Uncle Paul was in prison in Rome at the time. These were literally letters from the dungeon. Still, he wasted no words on self-pity. He knew that his remaining time was short and he wanted to make sure that I was in a position to

carry on the work of an evangelist. I was so young then, I desperately needed his encouragement and wisdom. So I received this letter with great joy.

Uncle Paul wanted me to remember the faith, the faith that lived first in my grandmother Lois and later in my mother, Eunice, and then in me. I don't know if you have ever thought about that word, "remember." The word could mean to restore lost or missing pieces - to re-member.

It seems appropriate that on this All Saints Sunday, I am talking to you about remembering. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that the church is so much more than this small piece that we see in our own particular time and our own particular place. The church has members from all over the world and the church has members from all over time.

Today we re-member the faith. We re-member the saints. We re-member the church. Today we catch a glimpse of that mighty host of saints marching down through history, with all the glorious banners of faith and courage flying above them. We are not alone in this journey.

Uncle Paul reminds me in his letter to guard the treasure that has been given into my trust. And I in turn remind you, to guard this same treasure.

On the second page of the letter, Paul spells out what that means. Let me share that with you too. Paul mentions seven things that are important to Christian living and Christian leadership.

1. Paul urges us to be strong in the grace of Christ. Remember that grace means to receive good things that we have not earned. After I had been with the veterans, Paul and Silas for some time, Paul sent me out on my own. He sent me back to the city of Corinth to check on the church that he had started there. I was Paul's emissary to the church, and I went into that job with all the pride and arrogance of youth. And I failed miserably. I failed so badly that Uncle Paul benched me and called in a relief pitcher named Titus to finish the work. That was so humiliating.

Yet, Paul reminded me that the grace of Christ means that God does not give up on us. We are given the strength to go on, the gift of leaving the failure behind and opening a new chapter. Paul kept me with him and sent me out again to do important work. And by the grace of Christ that next work was more successful.

2. Paul urges us to be faithful to entrust truth. We are to pass on the truth, and the good news of salvation, to the next generation and they to the generation that follows. There are lots of religions and clubs in the world that deal in secret knowledge. That is not what Christianity is all about. There is no hoarding of divine revelation for us. What God has made known to us is to be passed on. We are like runners in a relay race, each of running our own section of the race, then passing the baton onto the next runner. Let us never be the one to drop the baton.

3. Christians are to be brave as soldiers. An untrustworthy soldier goes AWOL at the first sign of stress. That is Absent Without Leave. When the battle is joined, soldiers must have courage to stay and fight for what is right.

I remember how it was traveling with Paul and Silas. We traveled all over Asia Minor and everywhere we found those who listened. But it was not always easy. Once when we were in the city of Philippi, Paul stopped and healed a slave girl of the demon who had been possessing her. The girl's owners had been using her as a fortune teller. Once the demon was cast out, she lost her use as a fortune teller. Her owners were so angry that they had Paul and Silas arrested and thrown into jail. One minute Paul and Silas were reaping the rewards of obedience the next minute they were suffering in jail for this same obedience.

Paul and Silas did not let that stop them or change their attitude. They sang together while they were in jail and witnessed to the other prisoners. Then when an earthquake set all the prisoners free, they urged them all to stay. Because of that, the jailer himself and all his family were introduced to Christ and converted. God is glorious!

4. Christians are to be as disciplined as an athlete. Every coach has encountered the naturally gifted athlete who thinks he or she is so good that practice is not necessary. After all practice and training is hard and can be rather boring. So there are always those who just want to have the excitement of the games without the bother of the practice. Such undisciplined athletes either learn discipline or they wash out. It is as simple as that.

Christians too need to be disciplined in our prayer life, in our Bible Study, in our worship. When a crisis comes, we want to be ready. We do not want to be like the weight lifter who did not start training until the week before the competition. When the crisis comes, we want to be prayed up, as it were, so that we can face the crisis in the full confidence of Christ.

5. Christians are to be as patient and hard-working as a farmer. The work of a farmer is not limited to harvest time. First the farmer must plow and then plant the seed. The farmer must trust God to give the growth and be patient in waiting for the harvest. He must cultivate, weed, and care for the young plants. So also as Christians, we plant seeds of God's word, we trust God to give the growth, we nurture the young in the faith, and we are patient with one another.

6. Christians are to be diligent workers. Have you ever seen a master woodworker guessing at the length of a needed piece of wood? Of course not, the master carpenter measures each piece precisely, follows the plan carefully, fits the pieces together sanding and planing just all is just right. The work of a Christian is of equal importance. In our sharing, in our preaching, in our teachings, there is no room for sloppy work. What we do is too important for that.

7. Christians are to be gentle as a servant. Christian leadership is servant leadership. Our leadership can never be about power or prestige. Christian leadership is by its very nature not of force, but rather of encouraging, guiding, persuading, and most of all loving. Christian leaders are warned about falling into the trap of saying, "my church." The church does not belong to us. The church belongs to Christ. We are servants of Christ and of each other.

In this letter Paul was reminding me to guard the treasure that was entrusted to me. And I once again remind you to guard the treasure that is entrusted now to you. The good news of salvation

is yours. This is a treasure has been passed down on the shoulders of those who went before you. Now it is your turn to guard the treasure and to pass it on to those who will come after you.

And remember too these words from Paul, “. . . God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Amen.