

SERMON 2 TIMOTHY 1 WILL YOU PASS IT ON

May 10, 2020

This Sunday is Mother's Day when we honor our mothers and those who have shown us the love of a mother. Hopefully, despite all the restrictions and shutdowns, mom will still get a flower, a telephone call or a card from her children. Last year I told you about a special Mother's Day card. It was one of those big cards written in a little child's printing, like you see in first grade. On the front was a little boy with untied sneakers. He had a wagon and toys were everywhere. He had a little cut on his face and there were smudges all over the card. On the front cover, it read: "Mom, I remember that little prayer you used to say to me every day." When you opened the card, there was the prayer: "God help you if you ever do that again!" I wonder how many moms have said that over the past six weeks of stay-at-home orders and home-schooling.

There is definitely no one like Mom, and while we set aside one Sunday a year to honor them, in reality we should honor them every day because where would we be without them. Abraham Lincoln said that no man is poor who has a godly mother. Another time Lincoln was asked what was the greatest book that he had ever read; to which he replied: "My mother." During World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt said that no nation is greater than its mothers. Lord Shaftesbury stated: "Give me a generation of Christian mothers, and I will undertake to change the face of society in twelve months."

While most of us would agree with these statements, there are those of us who may not have had good experiences with our mothers or even known them. However, I believe that most of us have had someone in our lives who has provided us with the loving care and guidance of a mother. But this morning, I want to speak not only to mothers but to all of us – fathers, grandparents, friends and neighbors about our responsibility as Christians to the next generation. Our scripture text is taken from the Apostle Paul's second letter to his young student Timothy, the first chapter, verses 3 through 7. Listen to Paul's guidance to Timothy.

Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage and guide him as Timothy begins his ministry in Ephesus. Timothy is basically a young minister who has just been appointed to his first church, and Paul is trying to prepare him for all the challenges and problems that are involved in ministry, and believe me there are many!

This reminds me about a story of a new preacher who was standing at the door greeting the congregation after his first sermon in his new church. Most of the people were very generous in telling their new pastor how much they liked his message, except one man who complained: "Pastor, that was a most uninspiring and boring message that I have ever heard." A few minutes later the same man appeared again in the line and said: "Pastor, it appears that you

did not adequately prepare for your sermon.” Once again, the man came up to the preacher and muttered: “You really blew it, pastor. You didn’t have anything important to say.” Finally, the pastor could not stand it any longer; so he went over to one of the deacons and inquired about the man. “Oh, don’t worry about him,” said the deacon, “All he does is go around repeating whatever he hears other people say.”

Paul begins his letter to Timothy with a word of thanks for his Jewish forefathers who while they were not Christians; they still worshipped the living God and sought to serve Him. Next Paul tells Timothy that he keeps him in his prayers day and night. Paul knew firsthand the problems and issues that Timothy would have to deal with in his ministry, so he constantly lifted him up in prayer. One of our responsibilities as parents, grandparents and friends is to lift up our children and grandchildren in prayer day and night. We need to put a wall of prayer around them.

Several years ago Randy Travis had a wonderful song entitled “When Mama Prays.” In the song, the mother is a devoted Christian woman who is always in church while her husband and son are not. The husband had even claimed that he would never set foot in the church, but mama kept praying and one Easter he walked right in and sat down on the first row with his wife.

In the next verse, the son comes home late one night after drinking and running around; he hears his mother in the living room on her knees talking with Jesus, and he knew right then and there that his wandering days were over, because when mama prays good things happen. Oh, there’s a lot of truth in that statement, my friends! Because when mama and daddy pray, things happen. The Book of James tells us that the prayer of a righteous person is both powerful and effective. We must never underestimate the power of prayer, especially in the lives of our children and grandchildren.

In verse 5, Paul reminds Timothy of his heritage; a heritage that he should be proud of. Paul tells him that he is thankful for Timothy’s sincere faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and then his mother Eunice and now lives in him. Timothy is basically a third generation Christian; he is the product of at least two generations of faithful believers who shared who they were and what they believed with this young man! His faith, like that of his mother and grandmother, was sincere, honest, true and visible to all. Although salvation cannot be inherited from believing parents, it can definitely be passed on by how the parents live their daily lives and serve God.

One afternoon during a revival, the pastor and the visiting evangelist were visiting homes. As they drove up to a lovely brick home, the pastor said: “In this home the mother is a Christian but not an active church member. The father is not a Christian and never attends church. Their

17 year old son is not a Christian but does attend church occasionally.” As they arrived, the son was coming out the front door to get into his car. He explained that his parents were not at home and that he was in a hurry for an appointment. As they invited him to that night’s service, he said: “You know, preacher, I sure wish that my mother was more faithful to the church. I think that if she really meant business about her faith, it wouldn’t be long before dad and I would go all the way with God.” There was only one person in that home with faith, but hers was not worth passing on.

Unfortunately this is true of many people today. Oh, at one time they had professed their faith in Jesus Christ and even joined a church; perhaps for a brief time they were active and faithful. But then, over time other things took priority in their lives and they drifted away. That’s one of the problems in our society today, more parents are concerned about their children’s baseball and soccer games, and their own recreation than teaching their children about God. Many people today put false hope in things like wealth, possessions, and people instead of God. Only one of these is eternal and only one of these is true and that is God. Think about where our world is heading when we are teaching our children to put their hope and faith in things and people rather than God! I’m afraid that the American family situation can be summed up in a bumper sticker I once saw: “My family is a freak show, without the tent.”

Thank God it was not that way with Paul. He went to Lystra and preached the gospel. God opened the heart of a woman named Lois, and she believed and accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She had the kind of faith that was contagious, and soon her daughter Eunice believed. She then passed her faith on to her son Timothy, who later became a co-worker in ministry with Paul. As our text this morning indicates, this faith was worth passing on.

A little four-year old boy named Johnny appeared one day at the door of his father’s study with a little baby chick in his hands. The father looked at him and said: “John, take that chicken right back to its mother.” “It has no mother,” Johnny replied. “Then take it back to its father right now.” But Johnny protested: “It has no father either; it has nothing but an old electric lamp.” An incubator or electric lamp can meet the physical needs of a baby chicken. It will hatch the egg and preserve the chick until it is old enough to face life, but that is all that it can do. In the same way, parents can provide warm beds, nutritious meals, and adequate clothing, but they can still fail to nurture what is truly important in a child’s life, and that is a genuine faith and personal relationship with the Lord.

I have shared with you before that I would not be in the ministry today except for my mother and the faith she passed on to me. She gave me love, a good education, a solid work ethic, but the greatest gift that she ever gave me was her faith. She not only shared her faith with me and my brothers, but she demonstrated her faith every day by how she lived.

Nothing kept Mom out of church on Sunday or even during the week. She loved the Lord and His church. She read the Bible every day and was always in prayer for her family and others. She taught Sunday School and played the piano up to the day the Lord called her home. When she died, I told my brothers that the only thing I wanted was her Bible. It is now on a shelf in my office where it reminds me each day of her faith and devotion to God. Both of which I hope and pray that I will be able to live up to.

So where did you get your faith? Was it from your mother, your father, a grandparent, a relative or a friend? But the more important question for you and me this morning as mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends and neighbors is – are we passing our faith on to our loved ones and friends? Someone once said that Christianity is always one generation from extinction. Our faith is a precious gift passed down to us; it is not to be hoarded and taken to the grave with us, but to be shared and passed on. I continually pray that Judy and I are passing our faith on to our children and grandchildren.

But prayer is not enough; we must also pass our faith on by the example we set for our children and those around us. A college student came home during spring break feeling somewhat skeptical about religion. When he got home, he noticed that his mother looked tired and worried. So he asked her what he could do to help her. She asked him if he would take the meal that she had prepared to a man who was dying of tuberculosis. She also suggested that he take a Bible with him since she didn't know if the man was a Christian. The son asked her what he should read to the man and she suggested the third chapter of John. After spending half the afternoon with the dying man, the son told his mother that the man had accepted Jesus Christ. Then he added that he had also given his heart to Christ. His mother set the example and planted the seed, and because of her efforts two men were saved that day! She had passed her faith on.

There's an old saying that goes: "Who me? I'm just a turtle on a fence." The point of this saying is that if you are a turtle on a fence post, you know that someone or something put you there; you could not have gotten there by yourself. This saying is a way of acknowledging that our successes in life are not ours alone; we have been encouraged, nurtured, and mentored along the way by people who have helped us arrive at our current state of life. We are maintained by the love of God, supported by family and friends, and a heritage of faith.

When Patrick Henry lay dying, he called his children around him and said: "I am about to leave you all my earthly possessions. However, there is also one more thing which I would like to leave you; namely, the Christian faith. If I could leave you that and nothing else, you would be rich indeed. If I could leave you everything else and not that, you would be poor indeed."

Many of us have some family heirloom that has been passed down to us from generation to generation. For example, I have my grandfather's watch which he gave my father and my father gave me, and someday one of my sons will pass it on to one of my grandchildren. In today's world many people often think about what they will inherit from the estates of loved ones. Can you think of a greater gift to pass on than a strong faith in God and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

Paul understood the importance of passing on our faith. He recognized that generations of the faithful always have had and always will have a hand in forming the next generation of faithful followers. As parents we can either be a barrier or a bridge between our children and God. If Paul could speak to us today he might ask: "What legacy are you passing on to tomorrow's children?" I hope and pray that someday, someone will write as Paul did in our text and say that they are thankful for their faith that they received from us. As one of our hymns states: "I'll shout it from the mountaintop; I want the world to know, the Lord of love has come to me, I want to pass it on." Pass it on; it will be your greatest gift to others. Happy Mother's Day!

Amen