

## What Have We Learned?

### 2 Timothy 1:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

<sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup> Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; <sup>7</sup> for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

<sup>8</sup> Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, <sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup> but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup> For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, <sup>12</sup> and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. <sup>13</sup> Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Throughout two millennia of ministry, Christian churches and leaders have drawn strength and insight from 2 Timothy, finding in its passages clear direction to pursue more enriching lives in service to God. This reading was written from prison by a father in the faith to his protégé, Timothy, to instill faithful courage at a time when such may have seemed hard to come by. While Paul encouraged Timothy to seek joy in the midst of sorrow, it seems clear that the finding of that joy was not always going to be easy.

There may have been a temptation to wonder about a leader who ended up in prison. "Do not be ashamed," he wrote in verse 8, because "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice" (v. 7). As it was, Jews and Greeks alike were taking offense at the Christian idea of a Savior on a cross (1 Cor. 1:22-24). It was preposterous, they thought! If it was true that Christ had conquered death, why was this Christian mentor now

suffering? What kind of conqueror would leave his followers in prison? Critics were taking the offensive. Some still are. Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, believes that everything about religious faith can be explained away by the Darwinian theory and that religion is bad for the world. Tough questions are being asked of our faith, but in our scripture we read that we are not to give in to shame or timidity.

We also read of Timothy's tears (v. 4). These tears seem to have been shed at the time of their separation. Life has such moments in the midst of loss and grief. The mentor encouraged his faith child on the journey of faith by focusing on the gifts of God in a spirit of gratitude and what he had learned from his walk of faith.

In the face of tearful memories and tough questions, he gave thanks for the gift of Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice and what they taught him. He gave thanks for Timothy's faith, and he gave thanks in verse 6 for the opportunity he had to ordain Timothy, through the laying on of hands. In the midst of struggles, there seemed to be no thought of anger or anxiety, but rather gratitude. Amid discouragement or even despondency about the setbacks and the challenges to the faith, the mentor's gratitude helped Timothy to see that he was part of something so much bigger—Christ's ministry. When we face setbacks, pausing to give thanks can make all the difference in the world. Gratitude puts things in perspective.

The author asked reminded Timothy of so many things he had to be thankful for and what he had learned along the way: He gave him several reminders of what he had learned from childhood and from studying with his mentor. Timothy had learned that God had chosen him and Paul to be servants of God; and not only them, but every Christian. Timothy had learned that Christ Jesus had given him and every Christian the promise of life. Timothy had learned that each of us have been given grace, mercy and peace from God and Jesus. Timothy had learned that someone was praying for him (and you and me). Last month Linda Holloway shared an article entitled: *The Sin of Not Praying for Others*. It was a reminder from Rev. J. R. Miller that it is our duty as Christians to pray for one another, something we should be ensured of and encouraged

by. Timothy had learned that there are those who walked before us and shared their faith...and we learn from them: if they were able to be faithful, so can we! Timothy had learned when life gets difficult and you are finding it hard to connect with that faith...rekindle the flame. Timothy had learned that God has given us the Spirit...who gives us power, love and self-control. Timothy had learned that our service is to give testimony about Jesus. Timothy had learned that we can rely on the power of God. Timothy had learned that Christ has give us life and immortality. Timothy had learned that Christ is able to guard us and can be trusted. Timothy had learned that sound instruction, faith and love are found in Christ. Timothy had learned that the Holy Spirit lives in each of us!

The author inspires Timothy to give thanks for the gift, but, second, as he wrote in verse 6, "to rekindle the gift." The greatest gift we have been given is, as indicated in verse 9, the grace that comes "not according to our works but according to *God's* own purpose and grace." 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.

So who taught you to walk in faith? Did you learn from your mom? Did you learn from your dad? Did you learn from your grandmother? Did you learn from your grandfather? Did you learn from your aunt? Did you learn from your uncle? Did you learn from your neighbor? Did you learn from your friend? Did you learn from your academic teacher? Did you learn from your older sibling? Did you learn from your Sunday School teacher? Did you learn from your preacher? Did you learn from your mentor? Did you learn from a book? Did you learn from a video? Did you learn from a lecture? Did you learn from an act of faith or grace, like the one we witnessed this week at the sentencing phase of the trial of the former Dallas police officer who was convicted from killing her neighbor when she walked into his unlocked apartment. The younger brother extended God's grace and forgiveness. Even the judge was touched by his act of grace and gave the former officer her own personal study Bible that she kept in her courtroom! How did you learn about faith?

For me, my faith teacher was my father. His mother died when he was seven-years-old and he made up his mind to give his life to Christ with the promise he would be reunited with her in heaven. As a youth he was the victim of bullying before we even had such a word in our lexicon. His father had moved to Kansas City with his teen and pre-teen children to find work when the crops failed in Arkansas. My father had learned how people treated each other without a foundation of faith. So, you can imagine the disappointment of me and my siblings, and my mother, when Daddy refused my uncle's invitation to move our family to Los Angeles, over and over again. My uncle promised to find my father a job, housing, and arrange for us to get in schools. The younger children continued to be disappointed as my oldest brother and oldest sister went to live with my uncle when they graduated high school. We spent our days in the fields dreaming of what it would be like to live in the lap of luxury! But Daddy wanted us to trust in God and he believed our hard farm labor would build godly character. Daddy was faithful in attending worship, in prayer, in study. When his aunt and uncle would visit on a Sunday morning he greeted them, shared a meal, and then excused himself to attend worship as was his custom. Daddy was also faithful in his giving. He had difficulty pronouncing the biblical names, but when we were young he read to us from the Bible. He instituted Saturday night family devotions. He made sure we could participate in the Sunday School class by reading and discussing the lesson and he led us in family prayer. Daddy would drive distances to learn from a good Bible lecturer. He would even stop the harvest for a time each fall to participate in a district meeting. Daddy explained to us that his religion was not just something one talked about, but what one lived. As a teenager my father was a good baseball player. However, when the games were moved from Saturday to Sunday he gave up the sport. For him his faith and his worship attendance were more important than his love of the game. It was my Daddy who prayed for me and taught me about the love and grace and mercy of God!

Christians have become angry with Richard Dawkins and the cohort of neoatheists. In the face of opposition, it is so easy to lose sight of God's gifts. The most

important thing to do is to stir up the gifts of grace and mercy and love. Claims that religion is “a force for hatred and darkness in the world” have trouble contending with the countless examples of Christian love and mercy. Imagine being able to ask the apostle Paul, "What are we to do about the likes of Richard Dawkins?" Paul, the past persecutor of Christians, would say that God in grace watches over the church. He would remind us that what transformed him was not an argument but an encounter. Our call is not to win all the arguments but to forgive as we have been forgiven, and to love as we have been loved. We must stir up the gift.

We must also stir up the gift of faith by praying and listening to the word of God. In verse 3, the mentor wrote of praying "night and day" for Timothy, and indeed for all of his churches. No doubt he was praying too for his enemies and those who opposed the faith.

All of this leads surely to Paul's third word about what we learn about the gift: Get in touch with the Giver. Let me tell you about two men. Not long ago the story surfaced about a sixty-two-year-old man in Britain who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and told that it was untreatable and he would be dead within a year. The man decided to live as if there were no tomorrow, buying clothes and cars and cruises and traveling and eating out. In a year he ran out of money and was unofficially bankrupt. The only problem was that he was showing no signs of dying. So he went to his doctor, and a new series of tests overturned the original diagnosis. The man became outraged. He had been given a new lease on life, yet he was contemplating a lawsuit.

The other man was Chris Wiman who was another terminal cancer patient—thirty-nine, newly married, newly published, and now facing sure death. He and his wife grieved deeply the shared life that would not be. "Then one morning," wrote Wiman, "we found ourselves going to church. *Found ourselves*. That's exactly what it felt like ... so that we were casting aside the Sunday paper and moving toward the door with barely a word between us; and as if, once inside the church, we were discovering exactly where and who we were meant to be." Long walks talking of God, deep sadness that told them

10/6/19

2 Tim 1:1-14

What Have We Learned?

of God's own grief. In the face of death, Wiman found no trite and obvious glories, but rather the quiet scrapings that assured him of a Presence on the other side of a wall.

What we have learned is that the gifts God has given call us into relationship with God. As the dear old hymn of assurance goes, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able" (v. 12 KJV). **J. Peter Holmes**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).