

2 Timothy 1:3-10

3 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. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

⁵I 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.

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

8 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, ⁹who 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, ¹⁰but 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.

Passing Down the Faith

1. Because we're celebrating the completion of another year of Sunday School today, I wanted to focus this sermon on the challenges involved in passing on our faith to the next generation, and it makes sense that our Scripture passage comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy. I don't think I've ever preached to you from Paul's letters to Timothy, so it might be helpful to tell you a little bit about Timothy and the relationship that he and Paul shared. Timothy was from **Lystra**, a town not far from Paul's hometown, and a town where Paul set up a church. He became acquainted with Timothy, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, all of them Jews who believed the message that Paul brought to them, that Jesus was the messiah who had come to initiate God's kingdom on earth. When he was in his thirties, Timothy began to accompany Paul on his missionary trips and helped him in writing six of the books of the Bible. The two men traveled and worked together for over ten years. Timothy may have been a bit more timid than Paul – in his first letter to the church in Corinth Paul urges the community there to put Timothy at ease when he comes to them. Eventually Timothy would be commissioned by Paul to deliver his letters to particular churches and to tend to those churches. Timothy finally ending up governing the church in Ephesus from the time of Paul's death around the year 65 until the time of his own death in the year 97 when Timothy tried to stop a violent pagan ritual associated with the god Dionysus where drunken worshipers wearing masks and in a violent frenzy would attack and kill people indiscriminately.

Timothy ended up getting killed by this mob he was trying to stop. He is now revered as a saint and given patronage as the saint invoked against stomach and intestinal disorders; probably because in one of his letters Paul mentions Timothy's frequent illness and urges him to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake.

2. I think about Timothy being that today we celebrate the completion of another year of Sunday School, and it's really a celebration not only of the children but of their teachers who have devoted their time and energy and compassion week after week to teach the children about faith and about a Christian life. It's also a celebration of the parents and grandparents who have deemed it important to raise these children and grandchildren in the faith, just as Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois thought that it was important to raise him in the faith. And so to those of you who have committed yourselves to raising your children – or your grandchildren – in the faith, you should be commended.
3. But it is important that you, moms and dads and grandmothers and grandfathers, have a clear idea of what this faith is that we pass down. And it's to this point that I speak today. **What do you think it means to be a Christian?** What is the faith that you hope to pass on to your children in the same way that Eunice passed her on to Timothy? I bet that if I asked ten of you what that faith is, I would get at least ten different answers. I believe that one of the reasons that the church has such a hard time passing the torch to the next generation is because the church has lost clarity in its proclamation, and with that loss of clarity comes a loss of direction. In order for us to pass on our faith, we need first and foremost to understand what that faith is.
4. Simply put, ***OUR FAITH IS IN THE COMING OF GOD'S KINGDOM.*** That's the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, right? *Thy kingdom come on earth.* This is the essence of Jesus' teaching; In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah:

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:8-9)**

This is the good news; "The year of the Lord's favor is right now," Jesus says. Captives are released; the blind are given sight; the oppressed go free. And the implications of this coming kingdom of God are quite simple; God will rule the world, and you're either part of God's kingdom or you're not. And because it's God's kingdom it is highly advisable that we become part of it. According to Mark's gospel, the first words out of Jesus' mouth when he begins his ministry are **"The kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the good news."** Since the Resurrection it has been understood that Christ will be the one who will return to rule this world when that kingdom finally comes, and you will either live under his rule or you won't. For those who belong to his kingdom there is the promise of eternal life. We don't know what lies in store for those who choose otherwise.

5. And Christ commissions those who follow him to **"make disciples of all nations"** according to the gospel of Matthew. And to make disciples of Jesus Christ we need to proclaim who he is. But not all Christians feel comfortable doing this, and the question is, "What inhibits us from declaring the good news of Jesus Christ?" Something was inhibiting Timothy; Paul implores Timothy to "rekindle" that faith in him – in other words, the fire has gone out. Paul reminds him not to have a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and love and self-discipline – in other words Timothy is afraid of something, like getting arrested or executed. Paul tells him not to be ashamed of his testimony about Jesus – in other words, he *is* ashamed, maybe because Paul is in prison, and Jesus was a criminal who was executed, and because Timothy hasn't really seen the Risen Christ he's beginning to have doubts about the truth of the message that's been handed down to him. And I think each of us can relate to Timothy; maybe you felt "on fire" for Christ at some time and now you're feeling indifferent about him. Maybe you know enough about Jesus to know that there's a lot of risk involved in being a disciple, and you don't feel that safe in his footsteps. And maybe you're feeling a little embarrassed about being a Christian, because there have been plenty of Christians who have said and done some of the weirdest, meanest, most misguided things. Maybe you want to distance yourself from the faith on account of all of that. *I* distanced myself, despite all the work that others had done to keep me in the faith. My mother and grandmother were a lot like Eunice and Lois, good church-going Christians, but for awhile I was too uninspired or afraid or ashamed to want to have anything to do with the church. I got better, but not everyone does get over it. In a study done in Switzerland in the 1990s it was found that even when both parents attended church regularly, only about a third of their children grew up to attend church regularly, and of course the number

went down as the parents attendance was reported as less and less regular.

6. So is there a way to ensure that you'll keep the faith that was handed down to you? Is there a way to ensure that your children will do the same? I would say that there is; **it comes through self-discipline.** Paul mentions self-discipline as a gift from God, and inasmuch as any of you parents or grandparents have made it to church despite all the circumstances that have stood in your way, the fact that you are here is a testimony to your self-discipline.
7. But coming to church alone will not guarantee that your children will adopt the faith that you desire to pass down to them, because you know that your faith plays out in more ways than simply coming to church on Sundays. **Your faith plays out in your entire lifestyle.** Paul has a great way of packing a lot of stuff into his letters, and if you look at first sentence of today's reading you'll see a really packed sentence that helps us see what a disciplined Christian life looks like. Let's have a look. Paul writes:

I am grateful to God— Living a life of gratitude, waking up in the morning and saying, "Thank you, God." And even when things don't go the way you want them to, give God thanks, because his vision is far better than yours.

whom I worship – I've said it before; worship is more for us than it is for God. Worship is simply recognizing God's awesomeness, and if see God's awesomeness you should want to worship, and if you *don't* see God's awesomeness you *need* to worship until you.

with a clear conscience – Wow! There is a reason to worship God; our sins have been wiped away, and we don't need to dwell in guilt or shame. We can have a clear conscience because of God's amazing grace, AND because we are walking in the Spirit. Like Timothy we stand up to the bullies, and we stand up FOR the downtrodden and the oppressed. We advocate justice and we are led by the Spirit of God, and because of that we have clear consciences. But if we are willfully disobeying God, if we twist God's word in an attempt to justify our sin, we're not fooling

God and our consciences are not at all clear.
WE MUST STRIVE TO WALK IN JESUS'
FOOTSTEPS if we truly want peace of mind.

as my ancestors did— our immediate ancestors got us into church, but our ancestors include Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Jacob and Rebecca and Leah. We worship the God of our fathers and mothers.

when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. How much time do you think Paul spent in prayer? It might be easier to figure out how much time he didn't spend in prayer; in Philippians he says, "Pray without ceasing." Realize that you are always in God's presence and love it. Don't try to run from it. The more you pray, the more your faith grows as God's presence is affirmed for you.

8. Keeping the faith is not an easy thing; passing on the faith is even harder. But if we embrace the good news, and if we as a church strive to transform the world as the Spirit transforms us from within, we may have the pleasure of seeing our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren embracing the same faith that we embrace and passing it on to their children.