

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – October 6, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

2 Timothy 1:3-14 (NIV 84)

I thank God, ... as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers...5) I have been reminded of your sincere faith... 6) 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. 7) For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8) So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord...9) who has saved us and called us to a holy life...14) Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Fellow believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ;

When's the last time you took a trip down memory lane? That might be a short trip for some of the younger ones who are worshipping with us today. It's fun to think back to your last birthday party or to remember what things were like in kindergarten before you went to school all day. The older we are the longer the trip down memory lane becomes. A 50th wedding anniversary or an 80th birthday party celebration often triggers such a trip – as you have the chance to recall some of the special times of your life. Returning to your alma mater for homecoming or participating in a class reunion often gives us the chance to reminisce a bit. Of course it isn't always a pleasant experience that triggers such a trip. Maybe such a trip occurs when a person has some extra time to think – like when they don't have a job, or when they are recuperating from surgery or laid up in the hospital. Surely it would happen when one was face-to-face with the prospect of the end of their life.

That was the situation which confronted the Apostle Paul as he wrote what we believe to be his last epistle – a final farewell letter. It's addressed to Timothy and it shows that Paul has been doing some thinking. He's been thinking about his friends – faithful friends and co-workers like Pastor Timothy. He's thinking about the wonderful way in which God had saved them and called them to be ministers of the Gospel. He thinks about the suffering he had to endure for the sake of Christ and about the wonderful promises the Lord had given them in the Scriptures.

As we examine Paul's reflections in our text today we'll also be able to reflect on our Christian life and our Christian faith and all that is associated with it.

Theme: The Christian Faith, Don't Take it For Granted

1. Thank God for it
2. Put it to use
3. Do not be ashamed of it
4. Guard it

After the normal opening introduction and greeting Paul begins his final letter in this way: **I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4) Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5) I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.**

Paul wrote these words from a prison cell where he was anticipating laying his head on the executioner's block because of his testimony of Christ and his resurrection. Although it would have been easy for Paul to be filled with self pity and complaints, the Lord give Paul the strength to be filled with thanksgiving to God – the God he served as he learned of him from his forefathers who shared with him the OT scriptures. The God

whom he served had revealed himself to Paul as he was headed to Damascus to persecute Christians and called him to faith in Jesus and converted him from Saul the persecutor to Paul the courageous and zealous preacher.

Obviously Paul had lots of time on his hands as he was imprisoned – time which he used not just to think but also to pray. Paul expresses his thankfulness for his relationship with Timothy in his regular prayers. If we find our selves with time on our hands – we can put it to use as Paul did by thanking God for the Christian Faith – the faith he has worked in our hearts, the faith he shared with us through parents, Christian teachers and pastors and Christian friends. Such prayers of thankfulness for our faith and the faith of fellow Christians who have been an example and encouragement to us in the past will no doubt create a longing in our hearts to be with them again. Paul expressed that desire as he wrote to Timothy. He longed to receive a visit from him not just to reminisce with him but to be encouraged by him and to encourage him.

For now however Paul would have to content to share his encouragement with Timothy in written form. As Paul prayed for and about Timothy he was reminded of the sincere faith which lived in Timothy – a faith which God had previously planted in the hearts of his mother, Eunice and his grandmother, Lois. We know from the Scriptures that Timothy’s father was a Greek and a heathen. But his mother, like her mother, was a Jew – familiar with the OT Scriptures – looking for the Savior promised there. And when Paul came to Lystra where Timothy’s family lived and told them of Christ Jesus – they believed his message. From the time Timothy was an infant they had shared the Scriptures with him and he too had come to faith in Jesus as his Savior.

Christian parents and family members are indeed a blessing to us as they share the Scriptures with us as little children. Paul’s words encourage us to pray for and give thanks for those who brought us to be baptized and who shared the word with us. These words also encourage us to share the precious message of the gospel with our children and grandchildren as they remind us that the Holy Spirit will work through those means to create a living and active faith in the hearts of these young people. Don’t ever forget the power of the Scripture to do amazing things and don’t ever forget the promise the Lord has made to faithful parents: (Proverbs 22:6) **Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.**

It must have brought a special joy to Timothy’s mother and grandmother when Timothy became a companion and co-worker of the apostle Paul. What a thrill it must have been for them to see young Timothy set apart as a Christian pastor and missionary. Paul reminds Timothy of that day to encourage him to put his faith and the gifts which God had given to use.

6) 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. 7) For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Paul was certain that God had worked faith in Timothy’s heart and it is for that reason that Paul encourages him to put that faith to work – to use the gifts he has been given – to fan into flame the gift of God. As Christians we dare not rest secure in the knowledge that we have been blessed by God in the past. Our faith isn’t to be something that is called to mind only when we take that trip down memory lane – it’s to be a part of our present lives too. The Spirit will fan our faith into flames with the Gospel in word and sacrament.

On a cool fall evening, if you have a fireplace in your homes, you might start a fire to take the chill out of the air. Or if you don’t have a fireplace – maybe you can think back to starting a charcoal grill or a campfire. Those fires often start out with just a spark – a small flame. And especially if we weren’t using any special fuel or fire starters we’d have to gently fan those sparks – giving them just a little more oxygen to help them burn brightly. Maybe we’d blow gently or maybe we’d use a piece of paper or cardboard and wave it in the air as a

fan and with any luck at all – soon the fire would be burning brightly. The Holy Spirit uses his Word and Sacrament to fan our faith to flame.

The Holy Spirit promises that his word will be effective – that the word and sacraments will create faith in our hearts and will enable that faith to burn brightly. That's why each of us is given gifts and abilities by God which we can use to let our faith show itself. But sadly we're often a bit reluctant to let that faith show. Young Timothy may have been a bit timid or shy because of his age and inexperience. Paul reminded him that the Spirit had set him apart as Paul laid his hands on him and commissioned him as a pastor and mission worker. When the Spirit gives a job he also equips us for that job. The Spirit gives us his powerful word as a tool. He shares with us the love of God so that we can love others.

All Christians have received gifts of God together with their faith. All Christians have been called by God to use these gifts to let their lights shine, to glorify God before others, to be witnesses of Christ, and to make disciples of others.

At times our lack of courage cripples us in our testimony of God's grace – we cave in to peer pressure and we no longer let our light shine – that's why Paul urges us to put our faith into action. That action flows from our use of the Word and Sacrament. Through the Word and Sacrament the Spirit will increase our courage, increase our love, increase our zeal enabling us to stand firm in the face of opposition and to serve others with wisdom and the common sense required of those who are the Lord's witnesses.

You are a child of God. You are Christians. Use your faith and don't be ashamed of who you are. Paul reminded Timothy: **8) So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9) who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10) but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.**

There are really two things that can prevent a bold testimony of Christ. 1) One is fear of a world which is hostile to Christ and 2) the other is a failure to see Christ as a priceless treasure.

Fear of Jesus' enemies caused Peter to be afraid to admit that he was one of Jesus' disciples. In fact it led him to deny Jesus. And Paul knew first hand from his own life that as long as he did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Savior that it was impossible to serve him. In fact he had persecuted him because of his ignorance. Paul realizes that in the days ahead Timothy might become afraid to testify of Christ that's why he reminds him and us of what Jesus has done for us through the Gospel. **He has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.**

These words are explained clearly and simply with words from Luther's Small Catechism which he uses to help us understand the meaning of the 2nd and 3rd articles of the apostles creed.

Paul reminds us **he saved us** – Luther explains, *he redeemed me with his holy precious blood.*

Paul says **he called us** – Luther explains, *the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified (made me holy and set me apart from sin) and kept me in the one true faith.*

To live a holy life That is *to live under Christ in his kingdom, and to serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.*

Not because of anything we have done. As Luther explains not even coming to faith was of our own doing: *I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Ghost has called me...* All of this happened as Paul reminds us ***because of his (God's) own purpose and grace.***

The fact that you and I are members of God's family – fellow Christians together with Timothy and the Apostle Paul is all a part of God's divine plan. Already before the beginning of time God had graciously planned our salvation. That plan was revealed completely with **the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.** Paul is talking about how Jesus died on the cross and rose again to defeat sin, Satan and death for us. We can trust him with our eternal welfare because he is the one who has won eternal life for us. And this is what the saving message of the Gospel shares with us – it reveals Christ to us and it emboldens us so that we are not ashamed of Christ or our Christian faith even if we would be called upon to suffer for the faith as the apostle Paul was.

This wonderful faith – the message of the Gospel has been given to us to share with others. Paul encouraged Timothy in this regard: **What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14) Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.**

With the help of the Holy Spirit Timothy was to continue to preach and teach the word in all its truth and purity. We too will want to guard the truths of that word so that they are not lost to us. We will treat them as a treasure. As we treasure that word for ourselves – we'll also be lead to share the treasure we have guarded with others. That's what we sing in the hymn: God's Word is Our Great Heritage:

*God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations.*

And that's what we pray for when we pray: *Almighty God, grant to your church the Holy Spirit...Let nothing hinder your word from being freely proclaimed to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that we may serve you in steadfast faith and confess your name as long as we live.*

The next time you take a trip down memory lane – think about all that God has done for you in Christ Jesus –

Don't Take the Christian Faith For Granted

1. Thank God for it
2. Put it to use
3. Do not be ashamed of it
4. Guard it

Amen.