

4. Lessons from Timothy: the Spirit?

The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' Luke 17.5

I am reminded of your sincere faith...For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for 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

Life in Christ is lived by faith! Jesus had already taught what that life looks like: self-denial, cross carrying, a radical new understanding of wealth. But in today's lesson He taught the disciples that if the same person sins against them 7 times in one day they are to forgive 7 times. The number 7 is a biblical sign for fullness, so our forgiveness doesn't end on the 8th offense, but is to be like God's forgiveness which never ends. So, it is in the context of being taught about **radical** forgiveness that the disciples, reeling under Jesus's expectation, responded by asking for more faith. They clearly knew their limitations in the flesh. Forgiveness is hard, especially when we have to deal with a repeat offender over and over again. In our text this morning the offense happened 7 times in one day!

In responding to their request, however, Jesus pointed out the wrongness of their thinking which caused them to ask for the wrong thing, an increase in faith. This was a quantity vs. quality issue, a subtle difference but profound, the difference between having a **great faith** in God or having faith in a **great God!**

Right thinking is essential to life, whether you are a doctor performing heart surgery, or a plumber fixing a pipe. The same applies to life in Christ, right thinking is utterly essential for us to live faithful lives. Wrong thinking leads down the path of faithlessness and disobedience. The apostle Paul understood the importance of right thinking for he wrote:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

-how?-

by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12.2

So, the challenge to live by faith has nothing to do with how much faith we have, but the quality of faith. For Jesus said,

If you had faith the size of a mustard seed,

at that time it was the smallest of seeds,

...you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Obviously there was a mulberry tree within sight, for Jesus referred to **t**
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is mulberry tree, when he spoke. But his use of a mulberry tree to make his point was more than it being conveniently in sight; for the rabbis taught that the mulberry tree's roots were so deep and so strong that they would last for 600 years. It would be very difficult to uproot a mulberry tree. Jesus is addressing the disciples concern with the difficulty of forgiving a repeat offender, or some other obstacle we encounter in the life of faith. The point is **nothing is impossible to faith**, when "said faith" is rooted and grounded in God revealed in Jesus Christ.

This is Paul's encouragement to Timothy who was facing fierce opposition from false teachers in the Ephesian Church around the right understanding of wealth. He wrote to Timothy:

*I am reminded of your **sincere faith**.... 2 Timothy 1.5*

When he wrote this second letter Paul was a prisoner in Rome, **for the second time**. The Book of Acts ends with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome from which he was later exonerated and released. His second imprisonment, however, was more severe. He was shackled and cold, asking Timothy to stop at Troas in order to collect his cloak, books and parchments and bring them to him. This unusual request suggests that Paul was arrested in Troas which is why his personal effects were left there when he was transported to Rome as a prisoner.

So the circumstances of Paul's life had dramatically changed from the time he wrote his first letter to Timothy to the time he wrote this second letter. It is clear Paul did not expect to be released this time; he expected to die. History records he was beheaded around 67 AD during Nero's persecution of the Church. All of this lends an urgency to this letter in which the Apostle invites Timothy to come **before winter prevents his travels**, and also uses the letter as an opportunity to encourage his dear son in the faith who is faced with fierce opposition by false teachers in the Ephesian Church.

Paul appeals to Timothy's faith, which Jesus taught in our reading this morning can overcome any challenge, no matter how difficult. Timothy has the

faith, he has what he needs; the apostle affirms that, but then he challenges Timothy to rekindle the gift he was given at his ordination when Paul laid hands on him. Timothy is dealing with fierce opposition, and the Apostle is encouraging him in the face of the challenge writing:

I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.... (Verse 6)

The point is, Timothy already had the faith to do the impossible! Paul is simply encouraging Timothy to exercise the faith he already had by rekindling the gift he was given at his ordination. The specifics of gift is now revealed in the next sentence:

...for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (Verse 7)

Paul's reference to *a spirit of cowardice* has often been thought to be Timothy's weakness, that he was a timid man, but the context does not allow that interpretation. Paul was simply contrasting the spirit given by faith, a spirit of power, love and self-discipline with the spirit given by the flesh which is fear, or our literal translation this morning, cowardice.

Also, the reference to "a spirit" in the text is not the Holy Spirit, but Timothy's spirit, his heart. The gift of faith has worked in Timothy's spirit and he now was a man of power, love and self-discipline. His heart had been transformed, he was a new creation in Christ Jesus, and the apostle is encouraging him to rekindle this reality in his heart. This is what Timothy needed to rekindle as he faced the opposition challenging his leadership in Ephesus. Whatever obstacles we face in life, no matter how seemingly impossible, the faith we have is all we need, for we have been gifted by faith with power, love and self-discipline. This is the way of Christ!

The spirit of power, although referencing Timothy and not the Holy Spirit, is not to be understood as Timothy having been transformed into a powerful personality. If we think that we miss the point! There is plenty of evidence as to what happens to churches that are personality driven. The CCC Session made an intentional decision at least 20 years ago, that we would not be a personality driven church. The spirit of power in our text this morning is referring to a person who has the strength of character to be bold in his/her exercise of **faith** as a leader in the church. Faith is always about trusting God in the face of life's challenges. That always requires humility, the very opposite of a strong personality directing things. The faith Timothy has was sufficient to the challenge.

The second characteristic of the gift of faith in leadership is a spirit of love! Timothy was to face his challengers, first, with the faith of Christ, trusting God thus standing firm on God's Word, but also, second, with the love of Christ. When the love of Christ is not present in my relating to others, there is something wrong; it is not about the situation, which may be wrong, it's about me. Loving in the face of provocation can be as hard as forgiving 7 times. The power of love was understood by the Apostle Paul who wrote the hymn of love to the Corinthian Church:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind...It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Who does that remind you of? Jesus, we are to be like Jesus!

Love never ends. 1 Corinthians 13.1-8

Love took Jesus to the Cross; it looked like He failed! But God, raised Him from the dead in the triumph of the resurrection!

The third manifestation of the gift of faith is *self-control*. This is more than the ancient stoic belief in self-mastery or the British "stiff upper lip," "I've got this under control!" This is a divine gift of grace. As followers of Christ, we are bestowed with the triad graces of power, love, and self-control. Again when I lose self-control, it is not about the situation, it's about me! Self-control means we are no longer at the mercy of our own emotions. If you've never been there, take it from me, its not a pleasant place to be! Self-control means we are no longer at the mercy of the circumstances of our lives! Self-control means we are no longer at the mercy of the bad behavior of others! For when we rekindle the gift of faith, for we are now responsible, that is we now live a life that doesn't react to life, but knows what to do, how to do it, and when it needs to be done without the emotional baggage! This has been my struggle for the last 6 years. These texts have really been speaking to me these last few years.

When life challenges us, whether it be to forgive a repeat offender, or to stand up to false teaching and practice, or some other obstacle of faith, let us heed Paul's words to Timothy, let us rekindle the gift of faith in our spirits, our hearts: a spirit of power, of love, and of self-control. This is a life-long process that continually needs to be engaged throughout our lives, I'm an example of that, if we are live faithful and obedient lives.