

Rekindle the gift!

Meditation on 2 Tim. 1:1-14

World Communion Sunday

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 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. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 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. 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 fear, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 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, 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, 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. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 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. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard

the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

My friend, "Sis," gestured for me to come to her table after our church supper on Tuesday. She was holding a blue bag and a wicked, sweet smile. "I have something for you," she said.

She had found a treasure while shopping and thought of me--a hand towel embroidered with Matt. 19:26, "With God, all things are possible." I thanked her and gave her a hug.

How did she know I needed encouragement? But then, we all do! Can you recall a time this week when someone encouraged you? A card or note? A small gift? Gentle word? A phone call? A hug? How did you feel? What did you do? Did you pass it on--and encourage someone else?

As we headed home that night, thunder boomed. Lightning flashed. Raindrops splattered our car. Soon, it began to pour! The windshield wipers couldn't keep up with the water flowing down; we could barely see the road.

I felt afraid. Silently, I prayed for safety and comfort in the storm. As I prayed, I looked down and saw that I was still holding my gift from Sis. Suddenly, the familiar scripture took on a deeper meaning. **This** is the God of power who calms the wind and the waves and the storms of our lives, with, "Peace. Be still." This is the God of love who calls us *beloved*, who is ALWAYS with us, closer than we think. His Spirit *lives* in you; it *lives* in me.

It's *this same* God, God the Spirit-- with and in us, changing and empowering us, uniting us in Christ--with whom *all things* are possible!

This is Paul's message of encouragement to young Timothy, his friend and co-laborer for the gospel. Did you ever wonder why Paul's letters were kept, hand copied and shared for thousands of years? Why would Timothy, first of all, keep Paul's letters after he read them? One reason is because they attest to the apostle's approval for his ministry, if anyone might question Timothy's qualifications and call. This would be particularly important for a young man like Timothy having to stand up to older men teaching wrong doctrine in his church. Paul, in v. 1, attests to his own authority, saying he is "an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God" and that he was the one to "lay hands" on Timothy at his ordination to empower him for ministry (v. 6).

But why would Timothy keep the letters throughout his lifetime? Have you ever kept any cards or letters people have sent you? I kept all the cards and notes people sent me after my surgery. Why? They lift me up, warm my heart and make me smile, especially on a hard day or in a tough week. They strengthen me to endure, persevere, and even be joyful during trials in this "holy calling," as Paul calls it in v.9 -- serving the Lord, seeking God's purpose for me and the church and always God's grace. For we are not saved "according to our works," but by grace given to us in Jesus Christ, Paul tells us, "before the ages began."

Paul is an encourager. He speaks with affection, calling Timothy, "my beloved child," (v. 2) with echoes from the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:11), when the Spirit descends like a dove and a voice from heaven says, "You are my beloved son..." He reveals his sorrow at their separation, saying he is praying for him "constantly"--"night and day" and remembering

Timothy's tears at their parting. He longs to see Timothy, (v. 4), and be "filled with joy." He speaks of Timothy's "sincere faith," which isn't just a set of laws, traditions, and rituals devoid of meaning, done without thinking and feeling. Timothy's faith is in sharp contrast to the Pharisees and scribes, whom Jesus calls "hypocrites" (Matt. 23:27): "You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." Timothy's faith "**lives**" in him just as it "**lived**" in his mother and grandmother.

It's important to know that Paul is writing these encouraging letters when he is in prison in Rome, awaiting execution. He is not feeling sorry for himself; he is not ashamed, he says in v. 12, "for I know the one in whom I have put my trust." Jesus is the one he continues to serve and obey, calling himself the Lord's "prisoner" (1:8). Paul urges Timothy not to be ashamed of him or the testimony of the Lord. He says, in essence, follow my example; prepare to die. (v. 8) "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God." He is passing on the mantle of leadership, much like Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha. Paul says (v. 7), Don't be afraid! God didn't give us a spirit of fear! The Spirit is "power, love and self-discipline" or self control.

Paul (v. 6) reminds Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands." The **gift of God** can be understood differently; it may mean a spiritual gift that God has given Timothy or you can see it as the gift **of God**, meaning *God IS the gift*. Paul means it both ways. For the Holy Spirit *is God*, we confess in our *Nicene Creed*, come to dwell with us, "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds

from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.”

Paul’s reminder to “rekindle” the gift puzzled me at first. What does Paul mean? The word translated “rekindle” is literally “fan into flame” or “stoke up the fire.” Building or stoking a fire is something people in Paul’s time did every day for cooking, warmth and light, or to refine and shape metal or silver and bake clay into bricks. But Paul isn’t referring to every day uses of fire.

Fire is a symbol of the Lord and His presence throughout the Bible. Hebrews 12:29 says, God is a “consuming fire.” In Exodus 3:2, God appears in a fire that burns on a bush, without consuming it. Fire is an instrument of God’s judgment (Numbers 11:1, 3; 2 Kings 1:10, 12) and a sign of God’s power (Judges 13:20, 1 Kings 18:38.) Religious sacrifices were lit by God and burnt by fire (Lev. 9:24). Priests were charged to keep the altar fire burning (Lev. 6:13). In Matthew 3:11, John tells those he baptizes with water that Jesus will baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire.” In Acts 2, the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and “tongues of fire” rest on each one. Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 6:11 that the Spirit cleanses us from sin and makes us holy, “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” In Luke 24:32, two disciples travel the road to Emmaus and encounter the risen Jesus, though they don’t recognize him until the breaking of the bread. Later they say their hearts were “burning within us.”

With “rekindle the gift of God,” I believe Paul is telling Timothy,

“Stoke up the holy fire that is burning within you and use it for all its potential to do what God is calling you to do.”

I was blessed to attend our annual Women’s Retreat at Riverside Presbyterian in Cocoa Beach yesterday. The theme was, “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend,” but it was really all about encouragement for women of God, weary from the struggles of this world. As I entered the fellowship hall, I received smiles, hugs and a white gift bag decorated with a cross. Attached was a diamond-shaped card with a quote from Charles Spurgeon: “The entire person of Christ is like one diamond, and His life in every dimension leaves one lasting impression.” Inside was a large, plastic “diamond” ring, a blue and gold pompom, Hershey kisses that said, “Keep calm and sparkle on,” and a devotional called, *More Precious than Diamonds*.

We talked, ate, worshiped, and some shared inspiring personal testimonies about “Diamonds in the Rough.” We laughed at Lorrie’s stand-up and a hilarious skit called “Diamonds are Forever.” I was truly sad that I had to leave before making Pat’s candle craft and enjoying the liturgical dance and evening worship with Communion by candlelight. How did the women who planned and prepared for this wonderful event know that this is just what we need? I sensed the rekindling of the Spirit burning in our hearts. Now I hope to encourage you!

Friends, don’t forget the *real treasure*--the Spirit of God--with and in us, changing and empowering us, uniting us in Christ--with whom ***all things*** are possible!

Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, thank you for dwelling with us and in us, changing us and empowering us to walk by faith and love and serve you and our neighbors each day. Thank you for giving us your Spirit, so that we may have the power, love and self control to do your will and use for your glory. Help us trust you throughout every storm of our lives and to cast all fear aside, for it is not from you. We ask that you rekindle the gift of your Spirit and help us to share the gospel with all we meet and to be encouragers, like Paul was for Timothy. Thank you that your Spirit unites all believers as One Body of Christ, in every time and place, something we celebrate especially today on World Communion Sunday. Help us to truly live out the vision of Kingdom--when all Creation will be renewed and at peace, when your work of reconciliation will be complete. In Christ we pray. Amen.