

Dynamite Prayer 4:

Authentic Spirit

2nd Timothy 1:5-10 & Mark 11:15-19

Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad

Hudson United Methodist Church

10 March 2024

How do we know what is authentic, the real deal?

For a real-world example, how about the Stanley Cup? Not the hockey trophy, but the “Stanley Quencher H2.0 Flow State Stainless Steel Vacuum Insulated Tumbler with Lid and Straw for Water.”ⁱ According to Amazon, this trending 40-ounce mug (a size I am considering for my summer road trips to and with grandchildren) retails this week for \$44.90, and now comes in 38 colors. My knock off choice comes only in a 40-ounce size, has only 8 colors to choose from and retails this week for \$22.97ⁱⁱ.

What makes one insulated tumbler the authentic choice and the other not? Both use the same technology. But the Stanley company’s reputation for making thermoses that keep hot liquids hot and cold liquids cold goes back to 1913. The knock off claims that it will keep water cold for up to 30 hours, while Stanley makes no such claim. But my late father carried the stainless-steel Stanley Thermos filled with hot coffee to work at the paper mill for over 25 years. If I want that kind of reliability to keep my water cold in my car this summer, Daddy’s experience is very compelling for buying the Stanley. According to The Today Showⁱⁱⁱ it was that reliability being discussed among working moms on Instagram that led Stanley to expand their color choices from gray or olive drab to Rose Quarts or Target Red.

Trendy colors do not make the Stanley stainless steel tumblers more effective, just more expensive. The technology for insulating their cups that makes them effective. Their effectiveness has been testified to by workers who need to bring their drinks with them to work, from paper mill trimmer men to third grade public school teachers. If I chose the Stanley cup for my summer road trips, but I would have the guarantee the Stanley brand’s authenticity and famed effectiveness.

Authenticity is the key idea in both Bible readings today. Buying the famed Stanley brand is a trending example of easy authenticity. Authentic faith's brand is God's dynamite power, God's *dunamis*, visible in faith-filled living. In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about Timothy's "authentic faith, which first lived in (his) grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice." (2 Tim 1:5, CEB)

We recognize each other's authentic faith only by effectiveness. Authentic faith demonstrates *dunamis*, God's dynamite power, love, and self-control. (2 Tim. 1:7) Authentic faith first comes to us by way of a person who loved both God and us. That is God's plan, the mission Christ embodied in Jesus' way of living. A person's authentic faith is revealed not by creed or custom, but when that person's spirit is "powerful, loving, and self-controlled." The Greek word Paul used for "powerful" was *dunamis*, a Greek word this is the root of our words, dynamite and dynamic. Authentic faith is the dynamic power by which God's reigns.

Sometimes it is easier to see the authentic when contrasted with the fake. When Jesus disrupted the Temple market by overthrowing tables demonstrates authentic faith and fake faith. This lone account of Jesus' anger happened in the Temple in Jerusalem just a few days before Jesus was arrested and crucified. Christ was angered because the market place in the Temple was forcing both pilgrims and the poor to pay scalpers' prices before they were allowed to pray in God's house. The chief priest and his cabinet were angered because Jesus' threatened their power. They chose to cooperate with their Roman occupiers to silence him with crucifixion.

Even a first time Bible reader can understand the meaning of Jesus' quotes from the Old Testament. A curious Bible student with internet access can easily learn those two quotes come from a sermon Jeremiah preached shortly before the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians. (Jeremiah 7:1-15) That sermon may be unfamiliar to us, but the Temple priests and other faithful worshippers knew that sermon Jesus quoted. Linking his action with Jeremiah's authentic faith, Jesus threatened leaders who were substituting profit for prayer. Jesus also assured the pilgrims and poor that God's love is never for sale.

The chief priest and pilgrims alike were making choices based on fear. Deeply attached to their faith and the traditions it created, they were afraid of doing things differently. From their point of view, clearly one had to follow the law of Moses to the letter to pray in God's house. That meant making blood sacrifices. Could pilgrims

travel by foot bring their living offerings with them? Maybe. But how much more convenient and perhaps necessary to buy their offerings in Jerusalem. But was it right to buy these offerings with Roman money? It may seem illogical to us, but before that day Temple leaders team had decided it was not right to use Roman money. Therefore, pilgrims had to exchange their Roman coins for Temple coins. As with currency changes made in our time, the people running the exchange made a profit by selling the convenience. One decision built on another. Soon the pilgrims, the poor, and especially poor pilgrims needed to pay their way into the holiest site in Jerusalem before they were allowed to pray. Fear and tradition made access to God a commodity that could be sold.

Small wonder Jesus was angry. Little wonder the people who were being hurt by this market were drawn to listen to him. Jesus lived an authentic life based on faith in God's power and grace. The authenticity of Christ's message still draws us to follow him now. It is our own authentic faith that gives our prayers dynamite power as we work with Christ to help God's kingdom come.

We may wonder if the merchants who sold offerings for faithful pilgrims thought they were making an honest living by being helpful. Were other alternatives for helping the pilgrims and the poor bring their sacrifices to the Temple? Where did Joseph and Mary get their two turtledoves to offer for Mary's purification after Jesus' birth? (Luke 2:22-24) Had that market been there thirty years before? Or had it evolved over thirty years under Roman occupation as the Temple leaders made choices to insure their survival rather than trust God for their survival? So many questions in the Bible's silence, all so much like the ethical questions we face daily.

It is also fair for us to wonder if Paul was there that day. Did Paul witness Jesus overthrowing the tables of profiteers selling doves? As a very well-educated and politically involved rabbi, if he did not witness Jesus' anger Paul certainly heard about from his peers. Jesus' actions that day could have been one reason why Paul was persecuting the early church before his encounter with the risen Christ on his way to Damascus. (Acts 9)

But after encountering Christ, Paul changed. First, he emerged himself in the life of the church ultimately coming to live in Antioch. There he was called by the Holy Spirit to his preaching and writing ministry. (Acts 13: 1-3) I wish we had more written records of the time that lapsed between when Paul first encountered Christ

and when the Holy Spirit called Paul to his unique ministry as an apostle. All apostles are disciples, but not all disciples are called to be apostles, a disciple whose spiritual gifts call the church into being. Throughout his apostolic ministry, “Paul modeled what it looked like to live out of a spirit of power and not a spirit of fear.”^{iv} Like those Jesus’ called during his ministry, Paul shared this call to apostolic ministry as did his helpers Timothy and Titus. Paul’s unique spiritual gift was his ability to attach Moses’ law to Christ’s mission.

The letters Paul wrote his protégé’ Timothy and Titus encouraged them to live with an authentic faith, as Jesus did. Authentic faith will not conform to the pressures of this world, but will conform to the demands of the Great Command that in all things first we love God and then each other. While we value Scripture as the written record of God’s voice, we realize its authenticity comes from its effectiveness as the *dynamis*, the dynamite power, that inspired it in the first place. While Scripture is the inspired word of God, its inspiration always came first through the prayers of those who held the pens God used to communicate with us.

We may not be called to be apostles, but we all are called to be disciples. We are called to live an authentic faith grounded in prayer that seeks God’s will rather than what is convenient or popular in how we live our faith. Afterall, if there were turtledove merchants whose table was overthrown that day by Jesus, what did they do next if their heart-felt mission was to help young women like Mary make a faithful offering? Did they set up again in the Temple, or did they find another way that left it more of a free choice for the pilgrims and poor who needed their help?

We will never know what choice they made, but we have similar choices before us today. And like them, we have the power of prayer, dynamite prayer, to guide us.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.amazon.com/St Stanley-Quencher-FlowState-Stainless-Insulated>, accessed on 2024.03.09.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.amazon.com/osse-Reusable-Stainless-Insulated-Cupholder>. Accessed on 2024.03.09.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.today.com/shop/stanley-adventure-quencher-40-oz-tumbler-t226227>. Posted 26 July 2021. Accessed on 2024.03.24.

^{iv} P. 52, Sue Nilson Kibbey & Rosario Picardo, *Dynamite Prayer*, Invite Press, Plano, TX, 2022.