

## The Good Treasure

A Sermon Preached by Christopher A. Joiner  
First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee

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27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

2 Timothy 1:1-14



You've gotten the letter at some point. You know the letter I'm talking about. The one that sets a table in your heart, inviting you to sit down and know yourself beloved, know yourself at home, know yourself encountered by grace, a letter that brings you back to yourself.

Someone you love dies, and you know how it goes. You get all these cards – sympathy cards – and you open each one to receive the grace coming from someone who thought enough of you in your grieving to stop by the card section of the drug store and look for the one that spoke just the right words. You open these cards, you read them all, expressions of love and care. And then, you open one, and something slips out of the Hallmark card. A hand-written letter. Someone, probably someone dear to you, writes directly to you, sentence after sentence, and you, through tears, are ministered to by these words that give space to your grief and express a profound connection. *That* letter.

You know the letter. You worked on the project, pouring heart and soul and hours of your life into it. And then it is done, and after the handshakes and congratulations, you go back to your office depleted, on the edge of burnout. You drag yourself back the next day to start on the next thing, open your computer, and there it is. The letter. Well, the email. But it might as well be handwritten on fine stationary. Your mentor has written a long email, thanking you for the work, thanking you for the gifts you offered, and reminding you why you do what you do, and how you do it so well. *That* letter.

You know the letter. You moved far away from home to go to college. You were a freshman in a new place and you knew no one. You get through orientation, you start going to classes, you're making some new friends, but at night you have this feeling in the pit of your stomach. You miss home. You miss its familiarity, its traditions and routines, but mostly you miss the sense of security, like it wasn't all up to you, that you had people to turn to. The next day you stop by the mailbox, and there it is. The letter. On one side are words from your mom. On the other, words from your dad. And to sum them up – we love you, we are proud of you, we are here for you, you are not alone. *That* letter.

“To Timothy, my beloved child...” That was how *his* letter began. And already you can sense the personal tenderness, something Paul does not display to quite this extent in any of his other letters. Just listen: “I am thankful to God when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.”

Here is what we can glean from this letter. Paul was Timothy’s mentor and teacher. Paul himself laid hands on Timothy, setting him apart for the pastorate, and now Timothy is in charge of a group of churches. He is separated from his own family, and the weight of responsibility is heavy for him. The last time he and Paul were together, Timothy shed tears, probably because Paul was suffering in prison. There is perhaps more than just sadness going on with Timothy, however. Paul’s words here seem addressed to a man whose faith is wavering, who perhaps longs for the security of Paul’s presence, and who is perplexed and maybe even embarrassed by Paul’s plight and what it might mean for the church.

It has been so, it seems from the beginning, even among the leaders of the early church, and certainly we know something of it today. We know, most of the time, that we have been given this great gif of faith, that it is indeed a good treasure, that it is the key to life abundant and true. And yet, life has a way of dimming the light of faith, we easily lose sight in the busyness of our days of that quiet voice within, that treasure that needs to be rekindled daily. If it can happen to Timothy in the first century, it can and does certainly happen to us in the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Someone told me the other day they were so upset that the family doesn’t have time to do what they did when everyone was a little younger and less busy. They would end the day by sharing one way they felt God, and then they would pray together. “We haven’t done that in years,” she said. So she planned a family meeting. The first time they would all be available to have the meeting to talk about having more meetings was two weeks. Two weeks before they would all be in the house at the same time without homework looming or any of the activities that took up their days. Two weeks.

We long for, most of us, the kind of rich life of discipleship which promises abundant living, but for many of us, we feel there is just not enough time or mental or emotional space when the day is done to do one more thing. And perhaps we don’t notice the fire slowly dimming until we look up one day, and we feel a long way from home, our true home.

Paul does not scold Timothy. He does not lay a guilt trip.

He sets a table. I long to see you, he says. But it doesn't matter, with his words he might as well be sitting at the table right then, breaking the bread, drinking the cup.

He sets a table, and invites others to join. "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."

No "get yourself together, Timothy," just a gentle reminder that he has all he needs. He has the grace of God, which has been there all along. He has deep faith connections within his family to remember and cherish. Now he is sitting the table, knowing himself beloved, knowing himself full of faith, and his grandmother and mother are there, and Paul, through these words.

"Rekindle the gift of God that is within you."

It is already there, in Timothy, in you and me. Already there. A gift. There is power there, and love, and self-discipline. All there. Already. Rekindle the gift.

The work we are called to do here is receive this grace, given to us before the ages began, to know ourselves and our gifts to be enough, as individuals and as a congregation, and to rise up not ashamed of this gospel, not seeing it as a weakness, not seeing it as one more thing to do at the end of the long day, but the thing that makes the days have meaning and purpose and power.

In the end, we each of us carry within ourselves this good treasure – this good news of God's grace. Paul tells us to guard it, which is another way of saying be good stewards of the gift.

I can't tell you what that looks like for you. But this I can tell you. Whenever you allow the space for Christ to set the table in your heart, in your home, in all the places you go, among all the people you encounter; whenever and however you rekindle the gift of grace within you, and help others to see it as it is in them, it's like receiving a letter, *that* letter.

The table is set. God's people have gathered. We have received our letter. Look within. God has given you the fire of faith. God has given you a good treasure to guard. You have everything you need. Look around. God has given us each other. We have everything we need. Rekindle the gift. Guard the treasure. Come and dine. Amen.