

“Treasure of Faith”
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
World Communion Sunday – October 6, 2013

2 Timothy 1: 1-14

Debbie and I had a very good experience at our marriage enrichment workshop last weekend. If any of you married couples would like to learn more about how it was helpful to us, please don't hesitate to talk to either one of us.

But on the last day, during the last hour, it happened. We had been avoiding it for the entire two days. However, we could not prevent it from happening. We were “outed.” It was revealed that we were ministers.

We had tried the entire weekend to keep our identities secret. We wanted to be treated just like everyone else. But the facilitator for our weekend knew that we were ministers, and made a comment within the group that kind of opened the door. One of the men in the group said, “Really? You're both ministers?” I guess we could take that one of two ways. Either we really let our guard down and became like everyone else. Or we simply don't act the way others figure ministers are supposed to act!

The truth is I usually do not offer information about myself unless I am first asked. Why is that? Why do I flinch when a stranger asks me what my profession is? Am I embarrassed? Am I unsure as to how to share my faith with someone I do not know? Why is it difficult to share our faith with others?

As you read this passage from 2 Timothy, do you hear the writer speaking to you? “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith found in your family . . . For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you . . . Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner . . . rely on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling . . . But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust.”

This letter is addressed to someone who is struggling in his walk of faith, and Paul is seeking to remind him of the gift that God has placed in Timothy's heart: the gift of faith. It is not something Timothy has earned or worked for; it is a free gift of grace in Jesus Christ through the testimony he has received from Paul. Now, the writer is hoping to build him back up, almost like a coach building up the confidence of a downtrodden ballplayer, so that he may not be ashamed to share this story with others.

I know I can feel downtrodden and beat-up sometimes, and I'm sure you can feel that way, as well. We don't feel good about how we are living our lives, and we feel embarrassed or ashamed that we profess to be Christian, while we sin before our God. We wonder what we have to do to “get things right,” and we believe we have to have all the answers ourselves before we can share the good news with others.

And yet, our knowledge of God's love in Jesus Christ is not something we have manufactured or forced ourselves to believe. It was solely a gift from outside ourselves that allows us to trust another completely. If that is our foundation, then why should we be ashamed? If this is a gift which has been given, why should we feel it is only ours, and not to be shared with others? When we are called by God's grace to know God's love in Jesus Christ, we are also moved to respond in a way that honors our understanding that faith is not something we have earned – it is something to be shared.

There were two phrases in this passage that particularly spoke to me: “rekindle the gift of God within you” and “guard the good treasure entrusted to you.” You could even combine those into “rekindle the gift of God’s good treasure entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:6,14). The gift of faith is to be deeply treasured each and every day, entrusted to our loving care. But through crises, stresses, distractions, and the monotony of life, we can lose sight of how valuable that gift truly is.

How do we know that we are in need of rekindling the gift of God’s good treasure entrusted to us? When we fail to view the world with gratitude and thankfulness, and instead see things through a lens that is clouded by self-interest and blame. *Some years ago, a 62-year-old man in Britain was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and told that it was untreatable and he would be dead within a year. The man decided to live as if there were no tomorrow, buying clothes and cars and cruises and traveling and eating out. In a year he ran out of money and was unofficially bankrupt. The only problem was that he was showing no signs of dying. So he went to his doctor, and a new series of tests overturned the original diagnosis. The man became outraged. He had been given a new lease on life, yet he was contemplating a lawsuit.*

To “rekindle the gift” means to stir up the grace and faith and love that we have received, and we stir them up by putting them into practice. When we face setbacks, pausing to give thanks can make all the difference in the world. Gratitude puts things in perspective (J. Peter Holmes, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 4, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, © 2010: 137*).

How do we know that we are in need of rekindling the gift of God’s good treasure entrusted to us? Perhaps we are asked to serve as a leader in the church, and instead of viewing it as an opportunity to deepen and share the treasure of faith, we view it as an intrusion in our daily obligations, so we decline. Perhaps we have become so engrossed in our daily workload that when a friend or co-worker lends us a hand with a task, we view it not through the lens of gratitude but through the lens of “getting us through the day.” Perhaps we see the person asking for help on the street corner, and our first reaction is judgment and annoyance, rather than compassion and acceptance. Perhaps we see a friend or family member stuck in a rut, with no energy or drive, and we chastise them for being lazy, rather than recognizing they are struggling with grief and loss.

When we face setbacks, pausing to give thanks can make all the difference in the world. Gratitude puts things in perspective.

Chris Wiman was another terminal cancer patient – thirty-nine, newly married, newly published, and now facing sure death. He and his wife grieved deeply the shared life that would not be. “Then one morning,” wrote Wiman, “we found ourselves going to church. Found ourselves. That’s exactly what it felt like . . . so that we were casting aside the Sunday paper and moving toward the door with barely a word between us; and as if, once inside the church, we were discovering exactly where and who we were meant to be.” Long walks talking to God, deep sadness that told them of God’s own grief. In the face of death, Wiman found not trite and obvious glories, but rather the quiet scrapings that assured him of a Presence on the other side of a wall.

The gifts God has given call us into relationship with God. As the dear old assurance goes, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able” (v.12, KJV) (ibid, 139).

May the treasure of faith entrusted to you by God be rekindled this day, as you live out your call to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God! Amen.