

“A Sincere Faith”
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
World Communion Sunday – October 6, 2019

2 Timothy 1: 1-14

For many of us, we have been introduced to the church and our faith through our families. I realize not all of us have had that as our entry-point, but for a lot of us, it was a parent or grandparent or family member who brought us or invited us to church, as a child or as an adult, and helped us start learning what it means to be a child of God.

In some churches, family plays a very large role in the community’s life. The church I served in Charlotte was very much a “family church.” There were two, three, even four generations of the same family in that one congregation. That idea of family pervaded the church’s identity. Debbie recalls one of the first Sundays we were there, and her being asked, “Who is your kin?” In other words, who did she belong to? She said something like, “I’m Frank’s wife,” and I don’t know whether that satisfied that individual or not, since we weren’t kin to anyone else there!

But it’s also special when one’s family connections are made as part of the community or family of God. Last month, Erin was assisting with worship leadership at Davidson College Presbyterian Church in North Carolina. After the service, an older gentleman came up to her and thanked her for assisting with worship. And then he asked if she was related to Frank Mansell, who grew up in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She said that yes, she was his granddaughter. And he told her how he was a really amazing man of faith. God has a wonderful way of bringing light and joy into our lives at just the right moment.

It might be our families of origin who introduce us to this faith journey we are on. It might be a sister or brother in Christ, who even though we are not blood kin to one another, we are members of Christ’s Body through the love of God in Jesus. However we are here, God has brought us on this journey. And it is a journey that can be filled with highs and lows, twists and turns, joyous peaks, and sorrowful valleys.

As you read this passage from 2 Timothy, do you hear Paul 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 one who is struggling in the walk of faith, and Paul is seeking to remind him of the gift which 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, Paul 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 of ourselves which 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 which 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? One sign is 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. Peter Holmes writes: *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 (a) 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).

Today is World Communion Sunday, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper with Christians all over God's creation. There are times when it can seem distant to relate to celebrations like today, for we don't see people from Africa and South America and Asia and Europe in their homelands. And there seems to be more and more messaging in our world today that anyone who is different than us - in language, culture, or ethnicity - is a threat to us and our way of life. We might be tempted to think we don't need those from other parts of the world - let's keep things to ourselves, and everything will be just fine.

If that is where you are today, I would challenge you to open your hearts and look at this community through a different set of eyes. We don't have to go out and visit the world anymore; the world is here and waiting for us to interact with it. What a blessing it is to have within this congregation men and women whose Christian witness has come from places like Brazil, Pakistan, Africa, Central and South America. What a blessing it is to open our doors throughout the week to neighbors from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere for legal assistance and learning English.

And on this day when we celebrate the Lord's Supper with Christians all over the world, we also are reminded of our calling as peacemakers among God's children. When we receive the Peace and Global Witness Offering today, will we consider how those monies might build a community center for troubled youth, or empower people to build a water treatment facility for potable water, or engage in dialogue among warring peoples so that violence might end? In our own

community, we will send 25% of what is collected to The Storehouse Food Pantry, located three blocks east of us on 30th Street. Their continual efforts to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick of our community are mending broken lives and giving people hope amid the hopelessness all around them. If there ever was a time when we need to hear the call to peacemaking, it is today. How will we embody the sincere faith we have been given, so that justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?

We are not called to judge and alienate those who are different than us; we are called to honor what makes us unique, and to build bridges through conversation and learning - to live our faith, not just tell others what we believe. I believe we are moved to see the world as God sees the world: not as countries with borders, and people insulated from one another; instead, this entire globe is God's, and all of its inhabitants are deserving of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

We have all been given a "good treasure entrusted to us," and it is up to us what we will do with that treasure of sincere faith: to share it or to keep it. May we not be ashamed to spread the word that Jesus is Lord, so that all God's children might experience a peace and trust which only God can give.

Thanks be to the living, loving God! Amen.