

## Sermon: The importance of Grandparents

Silvia Purdie, Cashmere Presbyterian, Sunday 9 October

Reading: 2 Timothy 1:1-10

Paul's second letter to Timothy was written to a very different young man than the one who received the first letter. In his first letter to Timothy Paul is charging him to go as his ambassador into a church in crisis, and 1st Timothy is full of instructions for that church, and empowerment to Timothy to be bold and stand strong and sort things out. It's all "Fight the good fight" and "These are the things you must insist on" ... including telling the overly dominant rich women in Ephesus to shut up and listen for a change!

It was a tough assignment, in the face of some stiff opposition. And it took its toll on Timothy. Now, when Paul remembers Timothy in his prayers, Paul remembers his tears. Paul writes to a man who was having a crisis of confidence.

And well he might. Things were not looking good for the church in the 60s. The early church was hitting some serious persecution; Christians were getting thrown out of Jewish communities and imprisoned by Roman governors. Internally the church was being ripped apart by competing convictions about who Jesus was and what it meant to follow him. Timothy's mentor and dear friend, Paul, was imprisoned in Rome, unlikely ever to be released. Had he failed? The incredible adventures and growth they had seen together through the 50s was under serious threat. Had it all been for nothing? Was it really true? What was real anymore?

By the end of the 60s the early church had come through a phenomenal transformation. The first generation of church leaders, those who had known Jesus personally, had died - both Peter and Paul martyred in Rome - and the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke were written. Persecution continued but the leadership of the church was in the hands of fine men and women who maintained the networks and the faith established by Paul and his missionary team and faithfully grew the church.

Timothy stayed on in Ephesus as its key leader, becoming its first Bishop, until we are told by tradition that he finally martyred by an angry mob when he brought to a halt a procession in honour of the goddess Diana and preached the gospel fearlessly. He was 80 years old.

Back in the year 64 when Paul wrote this letter to him, it sounds as though he was on the verge of giving up. It sounds as though he was

discouraged, disillusioned, disappointed. I guess you could say, burnt out.

So what does Paul say to him? He starts with affection - Timothy, he writes, "my beloved son". "I am so grateful for you", he writes, "I remember you all the time, I pray for you all the time"

And then Paul reminds him who he is and where he comes from. Timothy himself might feel like his faith is wavering, but Paul reminds him that his ministry and his faith are strongly founded, that's it's not just his own but it is gifted to him from his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. This is his solid ground on which to stand, his mother's faith and his grandmother's faith, and their confidence in him.

I wonder if you have been there yourself. I wonder if you can relate to Timothy, feeling worn out, wondering if he has failed, wondering what went wrong that despite all their best efforts things aren't working out so well, wondering if faith in Jesus is really true after all.

Times like this, we need to be reminded of where we come from. It matters to me that I stand in a line of faithful people. And I am very grateful that some of these faithful people are my own grandparents and great-grandparents. Your ancestors in the faith will include those who have gone before you and invested in you, whether or not they are blood relatives. I have a sense of being accountable to these people ... to my mother's parents who built the church and community of Taita out of the mud in hard post-war times. My grandfather who biked miles and miles on the gravel roads to take letters and food to the families of imprisoned pacifists during the war; my grandmother who played the organ every Sunday.

This is the gift that you give to the children in your life. For your grandchildren and any other kids you come into contact with, you are the link with where they come from, you help lay the foundation of who they are and what matters in their lives. Never underestimate your importance. And it matters that you speak words of faith to them. I encourage you to speak about your faith to the children in your life. Please don't assume they are not interested. Think about the moments you have with kids you know - whether they come to your home for cookies or whether you send emails to the other side of the world ...

What would you like to tell them about your faith in Jesus Christ?

How might you communicate what matters to you? Maybe the things you have grappled with, maybe the questions you live with, maybe the answers you have found along the way.

I encourage you to share your faith with your grandchildren because I know that when they hit points in their life when they feel discouraged and lost, they will remember you and what you said to them.

I wonder if we could pause for a moment and pray, each of us, for the children in our lives. You might like to hold your hands open and picture the hands of Christ holding each one of them individually.

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Lord Jesus, through your Spirit give us words to say that speak of you. Create the moments, open the opportunities, for conversations about faith, whether our children are small or grown, nearby or far away. Amen.

*For this reason I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. <sup>7</sup>For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.*

Keep alive the gift of faith. My Bible says "rekindle", and later on in the chapter Paul tells Timothy to "guard the good treasure entrusted to you" Keep alive. Rekindle. Guard.

We have been given the most precious gift, the gift of faith and all the other gifts that flow from that. But this is also a vulnerable gift. The flame of faith can burn low and be blown out. It needs guarding, our hearts need guarding or love can fade. Faith needs protecting, gently holding, feeding, treasuring.

Does your faith need rekindling? If so I would love to be able to pray for you.

After our service this morning I will stay at the front of the church, after the Bible goes out, and if you would like prayer, please come forward and sit with me. I would love to pray for you, and for your kids, or anything else you would like prayer for.

All of us go through experiences in life that whittle away our faith in a loving providing personal powerful God. Timothy was a fine young leader in the early church and he came to a point of crisis and lost his nerve. With the help of Paul he worked through this, embraced the suffering, held strong to what was true, and grew through that experience to continue in the long haul as a man of God and a leader in Christ.

I'd like to finish with reading the start of 2nd Timothy again, this time from The Message version:

*I, Paul, am on special assignment for Christ, carrying out God's plan laid out in the Message of Life by Jesus. I write this to you, Timothy, the son I love so much. All the best from our God and Christ be yours!*

*<sup>3-4</sup> Every time I say your name in prayer—which is practically all the time—I thank God for you, the God I worship with my whole life in the tradition of my ancestors. I miss you a lot, especially when I remember that last tearful good-bye, and I look forward to a joy-packed reunion.*

*<sup>5-7</sup> That precious memory triggers another: your honest faith—and what a rich faith it is, handed down from your grandmother Lois to your mother Eunice, and now to you! And the special gift of ministry you received when I laid hands on you and prayed—keep that ablaze! God doesn't want us to be shy with his gifts, but bold and loving and sensible.*

May you too be bold with the gifts that have been handed down to you from those who have gone before you, bold to share them onwards to new generations.