

"A Mother's Faith"

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Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-14
New Testament Lesson: 2 Timothy 1:1-7

I didn't grow up in the church past age 10 or so. As happens sometimes, my family got out of the habit of attending. So when I looked for a church to attend after college (having not attended since I was a kid), there really wasn't much to look back on that kept me connected to the faith all those years.

After becoming a pastor, I came to understand that it was my baptism that kept me connected to the faith, my baptism and all that goes with it. My parents, in having me baptized and helping me to start living into that baptism at a very young age, my parents passed along to me a faith in God and a love of Jesus that can never die.

It's the same faith that was passed along to Timothy from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, as mentioned in Our New Testament reading for today. It's the same ***faith that lives in you.***

Have you ever wondered where your faith in God and your love of Jesus came from? I bet you all have stories that connect your faith to the people in your life. Today is Mother's Day; how many of us tie our faith back to your mother or grandmother? Raise your hands. Lot's of us do. And no doubt, many of you can think of a moment or a memory from childhood when your faith was nurtured.

I remember going to church as a family, and always stopping for glazed donuts afterwards. I think I remember the donuts as much as church as a kid. But that's about it. And then I went to college and decorated my dorm room with a Day-Glo poster of Jesus walking on water rescuing Peter from the waves. Two memories; that's about it – donuts and Day-Glo Jesus. That was a strong image for me throughout my college years.

But still, as strong as that image was, when it comes to the origins of my faith, there's not much more to look back on, though I had always been a seeker after Jesus, through college and beyond.

Isn't it amazing that it's just two memories that kept me connected to the faith, two memories that brought me back to the church after college in my quest to know God and to follow Jesus. It's not much, but it was enough.

And that is amazing; praise the Lord! Because being your pastor is what God has put on my heart, and that's clear even looking back to my previous career before becoming a pastor. It was all in preparation for where I am today.

The point is, it doesn't take much for God to work in our lives. But it does take something. ***It takes the Holy Spirit.***

Can you imagine what life would be like without faith? A loved one dies or is diagnosed with a serious illness, and you have nowhere to turn. You lose your job and along with it your sense of self, your identity as a human being. Not so for those with faith. Their career is not the Alpha and Omega, the be-all and end-all. Our identity as Christians is so much more important, and so much more powerful!

When trouble hits – whether it's one more unexpected repair that stretches the budget way too thin, or a friend or family member who is floundering, or whatever you might be facing right now – when trouble hits, it is our faith in God and our love of Jesus that keeps us going and shows us how to act, what to do next.

Oh, and it doesn't have to be a bad thing that requires a strong faith connection. Think how important faith is when a child is born. As joyous as that is, can you imagine bringing a baby into this world without faith. Can you imagine raising a child relying solely on your own power, your own emotional strength, your own idea of what's right and wrong?!?

A life without Jesus – can you imagine it?!? Paul sure could – going all the way back to the time he was a Pharisee attacking Jesus and his followers, so misguided.

The misguided Paul knew exactly what a life without faith is like. That's why the Apostle Paul never lost sight of the origins of his faith in Jesus Christ, his first encounter with the risen Lord. And that's why he wanted Timothy to stay connected to the faith, and not only Timothy, but us, too. Staying connected to our faith is what keeps us from going astray, from acting badly amid the pressures and uncertainty of life.

In reminding Timothy of the importance of maintaining a solid faith life, Paul does more than just mention Timothy's mother and grandmother – Paul actually embodies the spirit of faith that we share with one another.

I mean listen to the tenderness expressed in Paul's letter to Timothy. First, he call him his beloved child, and he brings him a greeting of grace and mercy and peace, saying he is "grateful to God" for Timothy. Then he recalls Timothy's tears when they parted company and says he longs to see him (quote) "so that I may be filled with joy." That's quite a letter.

There is nothing Paul would not do for Timothy, just like there is nothing a loving mother would not do for her child, or a father, too. But it's a mother's love that is so central to a life of faith, so connected to us as human beings. That's why Paul wants Timothy to preserve and protect his faith at all costs.

It's hard to keep the faith in this world today, just like it was hard to keep the faith in Timothy's day – even harder, I'm sure.

To help Timothy keep the faith, Paul writes in his letter to Timothy, “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands” – ooh, there’s another tenderness in Paul’s letter – the physical touch of one human being to another, the laying on of hands.

How often do we do that when visiting someone in the hospital – lay your hand on the hand of a family member or church member or friend. That’s not us alone reaching out to someone – that’s God reaching out through us – through you, praise the Lord.

So Paul reminds Timothy – and us – to rekindle the faith, to preserve and protect our faith. And Paul assures Timothy and us of just how to do this, assures us just how to preserve and protect our faith. Paul says, “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather ***a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.***” Doesn’t that sound like a mother’s faith. Power and love, and self-discipline?

Does that type of mother’s faith live in you – burn brightly in you? And if not, what might we do to rekindle a Spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline?

Actually, we will explore that question more fully next week – how to reconnect with and nurture the Spirit of God within us.

But for this week, I encourage you – even as I encourage myself – to not let the world turn us into cowards in the face of struggle or hardship, but rather, let us remember that we have been given a Spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

No matter how big the problem or how strong the opposition, we have access to something bigger and stronger. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I have the ability to respond – not with uncertainty or fear – but rather with faith and confidence. Praise the Lord. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Loving god, we rest in your embrace from beginning to end, though along the way too often we fail to recognize your presence. Yet, you are with us.

Sometimes you are a loud shout to help us to heed your call. Sometimes you are a quiet whisper to help us listen.

You help shape our questions and are patient with our answers. You are full of compassion and caring like a loving grandmother. You are tender like a mother cradling her child.

You inspire us to soar through the heavens with our hopes and dreams. You relieve us of our worst nightmares, awakening us to your light and your truth.

O God, how wonderful you are. How good it is to be in your presence. We bring to you our whole life, our joy and our grief, our patience and our worry, our dreams and our despair.

Like a long-time friend, you know us beginning to end. And you embrace us, and pray for us, and teach us to pray for ourselves and for our world. So we pray together now the prayer that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**