

Sermon for October 6, 2013 – Pentecost 20

2 Timothy 1:3-14

Theme: Keep the Faith

- 1) *It makes you a part of God's family*
- 2) *It gives you courage in the face of suffering*
- 3) *It is centered on God's love for us in Christ*
- 4) *The Holy Spirit will keep you as you share your faith with others*

³ I thank God—whom I, like my fathers, serve with a clear conscience—when I remember you in my prayers, as I never fail to do day and night. ⁴ Remembering your tears, I long to see you and so to be filled with happiness. ⁵ I recall how sincere your faith was; just as it lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice before you, so I am convinced it is in you too. ⁶ That is why I remind you to stir into a flame God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ God didn't give us a cowardly spirit but a Spirit of power and love and good judgment. ⁸ So don't be ashamed to tell about our Lord, and don't be ashamed of me, His prisoner, but with God's power to back us, join me in suffering for the good news. ⁹ He saved us and called us to be holy, not because we did anything, but because He planned a gift of His grace and gave it to us in Christ Jesus before the world began; ¹⁰ it has now come to light by the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus. He took away the power of death and by the good news brought into the light the life that can't be destroyed. ¹¹ To tell about it, I was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher. ¹² That is why I suffer as I do, but I'm not ashamed, because I know Him whom I trust, and I'm sure He can keep for that day what I have entrusted to Him. ¹³ With a faith and a love in Christ Jesus keep what you heard me say as an example of sound teaching. ¹⁴ With the help of the Holy Spirit living in us, guard the good thing entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:3-14, AAT)

Persecution. We would like to imagine that it is a thing of the past, but the truth is that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world today. This past winter, Reuters news service reported that 100 million Christians are being persecuted worldwide – a hundred million! And, let's be clear – the persecution they were talking about was not merely the “verbal” kind. It refers to Christians who live under the threat of being arrested, having all their possessions confiscated, or being killed for their beliefs. Over 100 million Christians live under such conditions world-wide and countless more face a more subtle type of persecution from a society whose morals have shifted. Let's face it – our beliefs about creation, God, sin and grace are considered “fringe”. Friends laugh at our “archaic” faith. Our employers tell us to keep quiet about our beliefs. Society tells us that we can believe whatever we want, as long as we shut-up about it and don't try to influence anyone else with our faith.

If we witness Christ, we could lose our friends, our reputation or even – in some extreme circumstances – our jobs. This is the reality of our American culture. So what are we to do – keep quiet? No. Trusting in God's power and grace, let us learn to **keep the faith** by boldly confessing Christ's name.

Part One: Faith makes you a part of God's family

Our sermon text is taken from Paul's second letter to a young pastor named Timothy. Now here is the situation: Timothy was so dear to the apostle Paul that he treated him like a son. Timothy had accompanied the apostle on numerous mission journeys and learned from Paul how to be a pastor and evangelist.

One day soldiers came and arrested Paul. They took him from Troas to Rome where he sat in a dungeon – awaiting the certain sentence of death. And why? Because he preached the Gospel.

Paul's arrest sent shock waves throughout the Christian Church. Paul says: "*everyone in the province of Asia deserted me*". (1 Timothy 1:15 AAT) Paul was alone – only Onesiphorus came and visited him.

Paul knew how troubling his arrest would be to Timothy - how he would be tempted to hide his faith, fearing the persecution that was now starting in earnest. This is why Paul encourages him with this letter – the very last letter we have from his hand.

Paul writes his dear friend: *I thank God — whom I, like my fathers, serve with a clear conscience — when I remember you in my prayers, as I never fail to do day and night.* ⁴ *Remembering your tears, I long to see you and so to be filled with happiness.*

Paul did not use his time in prison to feel sorry for himself. He used it to pray for his friends. We can learn a lot from Paul – thanking God for the relationship he shared with Timothy in Christ. You see, Paul understood that when God calls a believer to faith, he makes him a part of a new family – the family of believers. God has instructed this family to be concerned for and take care of each other; showing the same love for your brothers and sisters in Christ that your Lord has for you.

So let me ask you: Do you spend time praying for your brothers and sisters in the faith? Are they on your minds and in your hearts as you bring your requests to God? Do you thank God enough for the comfort and the encouragement he gives you through your spiritual family at Immanuel? If not, repent; and in the peace of forgiveness realize the gift God has given you in each other. Through faith, God has declared us a family to take care of each others' needs.

And speaking of family, Paul says: *I recall how sincere your faith was; just as it lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice before you, so I am convinced it is in you too.*

Timothy's faith was a gift – a gift passed on through his mother and grandmother. For this Christian upbringing, Timothy ought to be thankful. It made him who he was and prepared him for the difficult road that lay ahead.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Thank God for believing parents and grandparents who consider the Gospel of such great importance that they drive their children to our Lutheran elementary school in Algoma. Thank God for the parents and grandparents who bring their children to Sunday school and worship. Thank God for Christian parents and grandparents who take their children up on their knees and tell them the story of God's love! They are giving their children an eternal heritage that is far more important than sports, a trade or any other legacy they could imagine passing on to their children. They are passing on the heritage of faith that unites them with all the saints in heaven and on earth – and that prepares them for the evil days ahead.

Part Two: Faith gives you courage in the face of persecution.

Evil days were facing Timothy – the persecutions breaking out against the church would tempt him to keep quiet about Christ. This is why Paul reminded Timothy of his faith and the family of believers that support him. Paul says: ⁶ *That is why I remind you to stir into a flame God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

God has given each Christian a spiritual gift: a talent or mindset to benefit the family of believers. For some this gift might be leadership, for others the ability to teach, and for others the ability to show compassion. There are many spiritual gifts. The point is that God wants us to use these gifts in service of the Gospel - especially during times of persecution.

Paul continues: *God didn't give us a cowardly spirit but a Spirit of power and love and good judgment*

God does not want us to be afraid. He created in us a spirit that trusts in His power to save. He created in us a spirit that looks out over this world and sees lost souls for whom Christ has died. We know that people will not be saved unless they believe. We also know that they will not believe unless the Gospel is shared. The spirit Christ has placed in us compels us to speak the truth in love – using good judgment. What does “using good judgment” mean? It means that we do not go to extremes. We don't preach hate like those ungodly fanatics from Westboro Baptist Church, who protest military funerals; rather we reach out for lost souls in love. We don't preach tolerance of sin as many liberal churches are doing today – unwilling to condemn sin as sin; but we preach forgiveness through faith in Christ Jesus. We use God's law – not as a club to invoke vengeance over the ungodly; but as a means to prepare hearts for repentance. We use the Gospel – not as an excuse for any and all behavior; but to comfort every hurting soul that despairs of itself and looks to God for forgiveness and salvation. This is the spirit God has given us through faith in the Gospel

“So,” Paul says, *“don't be ashamed to tell about our Lord, and don't be ashamed of me, His prisoner, but with God's power to back us, join me in suffering for the good news.”*

Preaching the Gospel in love will result in trouble. You all know it. Post something “Christian” on an open internet forum, and you will see all the toxic comments that pour in. The devil and the world hate the Gospel. Share the Gospel in love and they will do their best to attack you, to shame you, and to try to silence you. Don't be shocked by the world's reaction to the Gospel. Jesus has told us we can expect these things. Don't let this silence your confession either; rather – trusting in God's power – courageously continue sharing the Gospel with your family and friends – willing to suffer for Christ. And why should you be willing to suffer for him?

Part Three: *Faith centered on God's love for us in Christ*

Because: *He saved us and called us to be holy, not because we did anything, but because He planned a gift of His grace and gave it to us in Christ Jesus before the world began;¹⁰ it has now come to light by the coming of our Savior Christ Jesus. He took away the power of death and by the good news brought into the light the life that can't be destroyed.*

Jesus saved us – this is why we are to boldly confess his name. The almighty God loves us. In love He chose us before the creation of the world to be his dear children. In love He sent His Son to win our righteousness and die for our sins. By rising from the dead, Jesus proved that sin has been paid for, that death has been defeated and that we too will rise from the dead. All who hold fast to Christ in faith have eternal life; and there is nothing the devil and this world can do to prevent it. So why be afraid of sharing the Gospel? *If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31, AAT)* The devil and world may be able to hurt our feelings, make life miserable and even kill our bodies; but they cannot touch our souls. They cannot take away the life that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Part Four: *The Holy Spirit will keep you as your share your faith with others.*

Regarding this good news of God's amazing love for us in Christ, Paul says: *To tell about it, I was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher.¹² That is why I suffer as I do, but I'm not ashamed, because I know Him whom I trust, and I'm sure He can keep for that day what I have entrusted to Him.*

There are two remarkable things to note about the apostle Paul. First of all, I know of no other man whose preaching and teachings have brought so many to faith. Secondly, I know of no other Christian who suffered as much as Paul. His suffering rivaled Job's. But it was to this kind of “ministry through suffering” that the apostle was specifically called, as the LORD says: *“I will show him how much he has to suffer for Me.” (Acts 9 16, AAT)*

Throughout his life of suffering, Paul held fast to God’s promises. He was certain that nothing would be able to separate him from Christ’s love. He put his faith in God, and God did not disappoint!

And so Paul encourages Timothy and us: *With a faith and a love in Christ Jesus keep what you heard me say as an example of sound teaching. With the help of the Holy Spirit living in us, guard the good thing entrusted to you.*

In other words: keep the faith. Learn from Paul’s example and confess Christ in love – holding on to the Gospel’s true teaching no matter what kind of emotional, verbal or physical persecution comes your way. The Holy Spirit is with you. He is living in you. He promises to guard and protect, guide and comfort you as you use God’s Word. He will help you keep the faith, and deliver you to eternal life. Amen.