

Increase our Faith
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Year C 17th Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 22
St. David's Church, 8 am and 9.15 am/10.6.19
2 Timothy 1.1-14; Luke 17

Yesterday was my first St. David's Fair and I *was* indeed impressed, just as I had been told. I am amazed at your service to this church, your passion for bringing tangible support to people and communities in need, your welcome to visitors, some who are in our midst because of your friendly invitation to come and see what Jesus is doing in your lives.

Like the apostle Paul in our epistle reading today, I am filled with joy to see the faith that lives in you—grandmothers and grandfathers like Lois, mothers and fathers like Eunice, sons and daughters like Timothy. Experiencing your faithful service at the fair reminded me of yet another reason I am so grateful to be part of this community. But the fair only exists because of our desire to make Christ known and serve others such as students at St. James who are able to learn in safe, nurturing faith-affirming setting or families working to exit homelessness or communities in Uganda needing medical care.

I have heard stories that reveal how we have many Loises, Eunices, and Timothys, and Pauls in our midst. People who mirror the qualities represented by these characters in this letter to Timothy. Perhaps as I describe them, you can think of individuals you could affirm in these roles.

For example, Lois means better or much good—and we can see she is the trailblazer in her family in accepting that Jesus was the messiah and fulfillment of what she was waiting for as a pious Jew. The name Eunice means good victory (good *nike*) and it is always a victory when a child accepts faith from her mother and makes it her own. But Eunice also has a bit of a problem in her family because she is married to a Greek man who does not appear to accept either Judaism or Christianity. Yet she names her son Timothy, One-Who-Honors-God, and he does live into his name.

Today we will be looking together at the Timothy passage so I would encourage you to pull out your bulletin now and even take your bulletin home today and re-read and meditate on this opening passage of 2 Timothy and the first few sentences of the Gospel passage, Luke 17.

The Timothy we encounter in this letter is a person in need of encouragement to live into his name and persevere in the faith. The spiritual mentor and guide, Paul, needs to bolster up the faith of his protégé. In this letter, he affirms and reminds Timothy of the

faith that first lived in his grandmother and then in his mother, to connect his faith to the foremothers of the faith. We are talking a lot about community this year and how it works in the world—but here we can see how faith grows by the backwards glance to those who have come before us and were found to be faithful.

The Timothy we see in this letter is at a low point in his life, having departed Paul with tears and uncertain if the faith of his grandmother, mother, and spiritual father is enough to be his own. He is even unsure if the gift of God is still living in him, even though he was anointed and affirmed as a leader in the church.

We too can see a parallel in the laying on of hands in baptism of an infant and how confirmation is a necessary rekindling of the gift of God in the lives of young people. Some of us older ones need that rekindling of our faith.

Maybe you worked the fair and are exhausted and wonder, does an event like this really matter? Maybe you didn't come to the fair because of physical or mental health trouble or caring for a loved one or working to make ends meet. Maybe your faith is, like Timothy's, shaky.

Our gospel reading today allows us to listen in as Jesus' disciples expressed their need for more faith. Increase our faith! We pray with the disciples.

Increase our faith! We pray with Timothy.

In these two passages, we see that Jesus is enough and the gift of God's presence is enough to get Timothy through his current struggles. But we also see it's okay to ask for help—from Jesus and from spiritual mentors like Paul or Eunice or Lois. We don't know what Timothy was experiencing but so often we need that assurance of a father, mother, grandparent in faith to remind us that God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and love and self-discipline. Timothy is perhaps you, someone who needs to hear again that God saved you and called you to a holy calling according to God's purpose and grace.

But what is this holy calling Paul is reminding Timothy of?

Christ Jesus abolished death and brought life and light. In a dark world of instability, we need to know that again and again.

In every generation and in every individual's life, Jesus does bring us life. This is the gospel—that the brokenness of the world does not have the final say or power over us. That God will make everything right and that God calls us to repair the world.

In Jewish thought, this concept is *tikkun olam*, to alleviate suffering and repair the world. In Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey's book *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (catholic meaning universal not Roman Catholic), he explains that “in every age Christians have fought to remove sufferings, and have also borne witness to the

truth that [sufferings] can be transfigured and can become the place where the power of God is known.”¹

Christ brings about this two-part work in us and the Church carries on that work. Christ has reconciled us to God, but calls *us* to continue that reconciling work *ourselves*.

We partner with God by the power and help of the Holy Spirit to bring the life of Jesus to bear on all aspects of our lives. That’s why a caramel apple or a pony ride or the environmental stewards separating trash from recyclables are deeply connected to the Gospel. We raise money for projects that are repairing the world, alleviating suffering, and bearing witness that God can transform suffering because Christ suffered with us and remains with us.

As Frank said last week in Adult Forum, we welcome people to St. David’s because everyone needs to know that God loves them. Everyone needs to experience life and the reconciling work of Christ.

Many people around us like Timothy in our letter have forgotten God’s love for them. Or perhaps they never knew. What I find so astounding about our Gospel passage today is that the disciples who walked and talked and dined with Jesus—*these* women and men needed a rekindling of the gift of faith in their lives.

Jesus says to them, to me, to you. Your faith is enough.

But I’ll give you more. More than you can ask or imagine, desire or deserve.

You’ve done faithful service and I call you friends, not servants or slaves. You, all of you, are worth my love, my grace, my gift of life.

Well done, my *beloved* child. Now may you experience grace, mercy, and peace from God and Christ Jesus our Lord, and may your faith increase by the help of the Holy Spirit living in you.

¹ Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Originally published London; New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 36.