

"Rekindle the Gift"

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II Timothy 1:1-14

We're in the Letters section of the New Testament. The New Testament has 3 major sections - Gospels, Acts & Letters. Within the Letters section 3 books make up what are called the "Pastoral Epistles" - I & II Timothy & Titus. They're called that for the obvious reason that they were written to pastors. But they put them into the NT because they have something for all of us.

Timothy 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life

and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

The story is told of a Scottish pastor long ago who went to visit one of his parishioners who had not been to worship in quite a long time. It was cold, damp evening. But they sat and visited in front of a warm, cozy fire. Finally the pastor said, "Ian, I've missed you in church. Is everything ok?" Ian apologized (which was not what the pastor was looking for) and then he said things had gotten rather busy for him and he'd just fallen out of the habit. And then, feeling just a bit defensive, he added, "You know, you can be a Christian and not go to church." The pastor sat there and thought for a while. He was comfortable with silence. Finally the pastor got up and went over to the fire. He grabbed the wrought iron poker and used it to remove a log from the fire and set it off to the side. The log had been burning brightly. But when it was by itself, the fire went out. The pastor sat down and the two of them sat in silence for a while longer, until finally Ian said, "I'll see you church this Sunday, Pastor."

The man saw a great spiritual truth illustrated right before his very eyes. Our faith can sometimes burn brightly and other times it can almost go out, especially when we're not part of a worshipping, praying, loving group of God-seekers.

UCC pastor & author, Martin Copenhaver says, "*Christianity is, first and last, a religion of community.*"

We need each other. We were never meant to go it alone. We were never meant to be solitary, Lone Ranger Christians. We need each other for the fire of faith to burn vibrantly within us. And it seems to me that the basic job of

the church is

- to keep the spark of divinity within alive and growing,
- to keep the flames of faith burning brightly in our hearts and in our lives.

This image of fire comes straight from the Bible. On the Day of Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church, the Holy Spirit came upon the people like large tongues or flames of fire. And here in II Timothy, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy to *"rekindle the gift of God that is within you."* The word used here for rekindle means *"to stir up," "to keep at full flame," "to get that fire going again!"* I find these words from Paul to Timothy very encouraging and honest, don't you? And by being so honest, there's a word of hope here for us. Because our faith can sometimes be like Timothy's - needing to be rekindled, needing to be stirred up a little! Because Timothy hasn't lost his faith, he just needs to rekindle it, get it burning brightly once again.

And keep in mind, Timothy is a great Christian . . . of Biblical proportions! Paul writes to him with the utmost esteem and affection. Here he calls him his *"beloved child."* Paul played a large role in Timothy's spiritual development. Spiritually there were like father-son. Paul says to him, *"I am grateful to God . . . when I remember you constantly in my prayers day and night . . . I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith."*

So Timothy is no slouch. But like us, his faith needed rekindling. How do you know your faith needs rekindling? Here's two gauges I take a look at:

First, my capacity to love others.

Am I compassionate, patient, willing to go the extra mile?

I stepped out of the parsonage door this morning to walk to church and a man stopped me telling me he needed some money, \$9.00. I listened to his

story. It seemed plausible to me, so I gave him the \$9.00. But did I give it begrudgingly or willingly, graciously or self-righteously?

Pastor Bill Hybels tells the story of something that happened to him while on his summer sabbatical. He was vacationing in a small town on a lake. And one day Hybels was leaving a small grocery store and a man in wheelchair was in front of him at the register. The man took a long time to checkout and Bill was growing more impatient by the moment, getting very anxious and angry inside. Once the man finally made it through the line he turned to the side and Bill could see that he was wearing a Vietnam Veterans hat and had one of his legs amputated, probably from the war. Hybels said to himself, "Where is my heart? Where has it gone?" So that's one gauge, our capacity to love. Here's another:

Second, the frequency and intimacy of our prayers.

As the fire goes out our prayer life goes with it. I was praying at a hospital beside one day. It was a desperate and serious situation. I prayed so sincerely and earnestly, and it felt strange, because I was going through a spiritually dry time, and I hadn't prayed that sincerely and earnestly in a while. That was a sign that rekindling needed to take place.

How do we rekindle our faith? How do we get the fire to burn brighter within us? There are many ways of course. Let's look at the ones Paul refers to. How can we rekindle our faith?

First, by remembering its beginnings.

Paul reminds him of how he received his faith - through his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. And he reminds him of the moment that Paul placed his hands on Timothy's head at his ordination and prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill him and empower him for ministry. He calls Timothy his "beloved child," which would have reminded Timothy of all the talks he & Paul had and how much he had learned from St. Paul. All these things would have taken him back to the beginnings of his faith.

John Gottman, researcher on Marriage, specifically, what makes marriages succeed and what makes them fail? Happily Married Couples have a reservoir of wonderful memories of their earliest days together - when they met, first date, engagement, wedding, honeymoon, etc. "Remember when . . . ?" they say a lot. Alisa & I went to this sculpture park That's a beautiful memory that takes us both back to when we first fell in love with each other. And by remembering that and reminiscing about that our love is rekindled.

So think about your faith journey - how it began, when it first began to make sense, the people who helped shape your faith, who demonstrated faith to you It's helpful to think back upon your spiritual journey:

- how did your faith develop?
- who inspired you?
- what experiences shaped you?
- what experiences changed you?
- what Bible passages or stories got your attention?
- what spiritual truths helped your faith come alive?
- when did you first fall in love with God?

Paul takes Timothy back to the beginnings of his faith to help rekindle his faith and his love for God.

The other thing Paul does is he takes Timothy to the heart of our faith and reminds him of what a treasure we have. Vs 14: *"Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."*

Paul reminds Timothy of the very core of our faith - things Timothy had heard countless times before, but truths that Paul trusted would refresh his soul in the present.

It's like the hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story." *"I love to tell the story for those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest; and when in scenes of glory I sing the new, new song. Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long."*

Paul reminds Timothy that God has reached out to us in Christ, inviting us into a relationship with our Creator through grace, and how Christ has brought us new and everlasting life. Sometimes during our nursing home services, I'll tell the folks how much God loves them and someone will call out, "That's just wonderful!" Yes. It is.

In conclusion, there's a few things I like you to remember about Paul's words to Timothy here.

1. Our faith is like a fire - sometimes it burns hot and other times it needs rekindling.
2. Remembering the beginnings of our faith can rekindle it.
3. Going to the heart of our faith can remind us of what a treasure we have.

It seems to mean that Christ gave us the meal of Holy communion to rekindle our faith.

- to take us back to the beginning of our faith
- to remind us of the central truths of our faith
- to remind us of what a treasure we have in God.

The service continued with Holy Communion.

Amen.