

Rekindling the Gift of God Within Us

2 Timothy 1:1-14
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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Today is a day of celebration. We are celebrating the opportunity to contribute to efforts that enhance ministries of peacemaking and mission, internationally, here and in Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery, and locally through our own community of faith. That will be through our annual **Peace & Global Witness Offering** sponsored by the Presbyterian Church (USA). We are also celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper with Christians around the globe on this annual **World Communion Sunday**, as represented by our Communion Table this morning.

The purpose of this coordinated event is to **recognize our unity as followers of the ways and teachings of Jesus**, even with the plurality and diversity of ministries and theological beliefs among Christians worldwide. It's also fitting that in our Epistle Reading from 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul (or, according to most modern biblical scholars a later disciple of Paul's using his name) makes reference to our connectedness to other people of faith, in particular, to our own relatives and forbearers.

In verse 5 of chapter 1, the author writes to Timothy, who is Paul's young colleague in the ministry, "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." The author's mention of Timothy's grandmother and mother function as a chain of succession, ensuring the continuity of faith from one generation to the next. That is an important role that parents, foster parents, guardians, and communities of faith, like College Hill, continue to play in the journey of faith of our children and youth, and frankly, of each other. This passage also underscores the important and **vital role that women have always played in revealing and sharing a sincere and living faith.**

Just as Timothy is an heir of the faith of his family, so are we. It is a faith tradition that started with a handful of disciples a couple thousand years ago, and eventually spread to cover the entire world. But this is no mere family hand-me-down. The author calls it a "sincere" faith, a "gift of God that is within you" and a "good treasure entrusted to you."

What does the biblical author mean by a "**sincere**" faith? The literal meaning of the Greek word translated as "sincere" is "**without hypocrisy.**" A primary criticism Jesus had of many people in his own time – especially the religious leaders – was that they were hypocrites. I'd venture to guess Jesus would have the same criticism about many religious folks in our day and age.

Hypocrisy takes many forms, such as saying one thing while doing another; in other words, not practicing what you preach; or as is often phrased, talking the talk, but not walking the walk. It's not putting our faith into action. Or, as stated in the New Testament Book of James, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17). Hypocrisy also comes in the form of judging and condemning others while ignoring or excusing one's own blatant faults and sinfulness. You may remember the biblical imperative about

removing the log from our own eye *before* trying to remove the speck in our neighbor's eye (Matt. 7:5).

One of the most insidious elements that come with being a hypocrite is that it often leads to **legalism**. Those who are legalistic focus on rules, regulations and hand-picked beliefs associated with a particular religious system while often ignoring the weightier issues of faith, such as love, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, justice, and peacemaking. So, when the author of this letter calls Timothy's faith 'sincere,' he means it is an authentic and non-pretentious faith.

It is the kind of faith that leads us to wear our faith *not* on our sleeves for show, as so many politicians are now doing to garner votes, but inwardly in our hearts and outwardly in and through our actions. It's a good idea, then, for each of us to spend some time reflecting upon the sincerity of our own faith. This involves the courage to see if any hypocrisy has drifted into our own attitudes and actions.

After commenting on Timothy's sincere faith, again a faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, the author continues, "For this reason I remind you to **rekindle the gift of God that is within you.**" This has become one of my favorite passages of scripture, and this is why. The Greek word for "rekindle" is a wonderfully picturesque word. It consists of three linguistic elements: "again," "bring to life," and "to light a fire." Thus, the combination of meanings in this one word, rekindle (which only appears this one time in the New Testament) urges Timothy to **bring a certain fire back into his life**. It functions as a call to spiritual renewal. Apparently, for Timothy, this was a fire, a passion, that once blazed brightly, but evidently has grown dimmer. I think many of us could say the same – **our faith (and I'm not talking about certainty of beliefs or any particular belief system, but rather simply being a person of faith) may have once burned brightly in you, in my, and in us as a community of faith, but perhaps that flame, that passion has grown dimmer**. Our 'more light' may be a little less light. The years of dealing with the pandemic may be a contributing factor.

If so, take to heart this powerful message of encouragement to rekindle this gift in you. And while the author could have referred to any number of gifts and talents that God has blessed each one of us with, he refers to one particular gift. That is, "**the gift of God that is within you.**" That's not just any talent or ability; it is the very gift of God's Sacred Presence that dwells within you and me, and I believe, contrary to some Christian teachings, within everyone else – regardless of faith tradition, or no tradition.

There is no greater gift, period, than to recognize that God is a gift what dwells within the depths of our very being. It's very likely that the ancient Celtic tradition was very fond of this passage, for it expresses a core belief of Celtic spirituality – **God's Sacred Presence, Divinity itself, dwells within all things that God has created.**

For some reason, however, that gift of God within Timothy was growing dimmer, whether through his own inattentiveness, or more likely, a loss of confidence brought on by the sufferings and the stresses of life itself. The same may be taking a toll on our faith. Timothy was *encouraged* therefore, as are we, to rekindle that gift – to relight the fire of sincere faith within him, and within ourselves. We are reminded in verse 7, therefore, "**God did not give us a spirit of cowardice [or timidity], but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.**" Now, you know me well enough to know that I'm not a "name-it-and-claim-it" kind of preacher. But *maybe* I am when it comes to this particular biblical passage. For each one of us can claim the spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline that God has freely given to all of us through the indwelling Sacred Presence of God.

Why is this so important? A faith that is sincere, without hypocrisy, without pretense, can and does have a profound impact in our world. Living a life of faith based on love, forgiveness, compassion, peace, and justice can and does have the power to **transform lives** – yours and mine, ours together, and others.

Therefore, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper on this World Communion Sunday, let us, like Timothy, guard the good treasure entrusted to us, with the help, as verse 14 tells us, of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Rekindle – relight the fire – of the gift of God within you, and within the life and ministry of this community of faith, as we claim the Spirit of power and love and self-discipline.

Amen.