

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

2 Timothy 1: 1-14

[1] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, [2] To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. [3] I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. [4] As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. [5] I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. [6] For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, [7] for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. [8] Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, [9] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, [10] and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, [11] for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, [12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. [13] Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. [14] By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you. (ESV)

First and Second Timothy, along with the letter to Titus, are not letters written to churches, but to individuals. The church lived through its infant years and is quickly growing up. The apostles were aging or martyred and the human leadership of the Christian church will pass on to a new generation. Timothy is one of Paul's young protégés. He has traveled with Paul and is in line to step up to the

plate and assume leadership when Paul is martyred for the faith.

It is a scary time for the young church! Losing the apostles is a jolt to the young church. For Timothy, the loss of Paul will be similar to losing a parent. We are always so grateful for the work and support of influential people, who have shared their wisdom, their experience, and the gifts God gave to them. When they are gone, it is natural for us to say”

"Whatever will we do without _____?" (You fill in the blank.)

It is tough to think about moving forward without our parents, or our most cherished mentors. The letters to Timothy and to another young leader named Titus provide critical insights for growing and building the church and the life of Christian people in a world that is not friendly to Christianity -- a world just like ours.

The second letter to Timothy is one of the more personal letters in the New Testament. Paul longs for human companionship, the company of young Timothy and the warmth of Christian fellowship. Paul had wonderful experiences as he worked with Timothy, and he must have felt confident about this young man whom God has raised up to be a shepherd to people Paul loved dearly. His words to Timothy are a treasure of advice and an urgent agenda for the future of the young church.

He points to Timothy's faith. *"I am reminded of your sincere faith..."* Paul says, *"a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you."*

Timothy, like every child, was not born walking. He was born helpless and weak, not even able to sit up on his own. As he grew older and his bones and muscles strengthened, he was hoisted to the shoulders of his mom or dad, and was able to go places and see things that he could not have done on his own, by his own power or skill. We don't know precisely when Timothy's Christian education began, but if his home was like the homes of other believers, his home life was filled with frequent

references to God, and how God was involved in giving them life and providing for their needs. They looked forward to days of worship, when they would meet together and share how God was blessing their families. Without books, parents and elders told Bible stories, sang Psalms, and explained God's law, and what it meant to be part of the covenant people of God. They shared the stories and parables that Jesus had used in teaching. Timothy's faith was formed in an atmosphere of loving care and constant attention, and it was his mother and his grandmother who were instrumental in his spiritual growth. Because of the special relationship that mothers and grandmothers have with their children, their examples and their teaching were used by the Holy Spirit to grow his faith.

As Timothy grew and took his place in the family of believers, there was something plain and convincing about Timothy that made him stand out among the other believers. It was obvious to Paul and to others. It's natural for us to say that it was his faith, but we all know that faith cannot be seen. While we can't SEE faith, we can see the outcome of faith. We can see what faith produces. We see it around us, especially when we are encouraged to look for it. We pause to thank God for what we see, and even for what we cannot see personally.

Even the world acknowledges that some people can see things more clearly than others. We all would love to have 20/20 vision, but some of us haven't seen like that for decades! In other words, your vision is "normal" if you can stand 20 feet away from the vision chart and most people can see what you see at the same 20 feet. But if you have old coke bottle bottoms for glasses, you may have vision that is 20/180: what you can see at 20 feet can be seen just as well by people with normal vision 180 feet away!

There are, however, a few people who have 20/10 vision. If a normal person can see something from 10 feet away, the person with terrific vision can stand 20 feet away and see all the detail perfectly.

Some of the great discoveries and explanations in human history have been made by notable people

whom we call "visionaries." They have been able to see things and make sense out of things that normal people don't see. It was Isaac Newton (the guy who invented applesauce from falling apples), who said, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." It was a humble way of saying that he had built on the hard work and helpful guidance of many others whose work was every bit as important and valuable as his own. He had a clear and perceptive vision, but he credited his high standing in the scientific world to standing on the shoulders of giants – in his case, hard working scientists and mental giants – that enabled him to see and conclude things that others could not. He only took it the next logical step.

I am confident that Timothy would make the same kind of statement of the gift of faith. He didn't deserve the credit. It wasn't his idea. It had not been created by him, and he had not transmitted it to himself. First of all, Timothy's faith is "*sincere*." The literal meaning of the word translated "sincere" is "without hypocrisy."

Paul writes, "*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.*"

If you were to follow someone over a period of time and observe them coming to worship, and witness them putting envelopes in a collection plate and see them bowing their heads during prayer -- would this mean that the person was a person of sincere faith? We'd like to think so.

In verse 14, Timothy is charged with "guarding the good treasure" which was entrusted to him. The good treasure is the gift of sincere faith that Timothy will now have a major part in sharing with others.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this time in the life of the young church. What an awesome thing it must have been for the young generation of Christian leaders to consider the fact that what was given to the apostles by Jesus Christ was now being given to them -- the responsibility for carrying out the mission of Christ himself.

We hear frequent discussion in our churches about the need for fresh and inspired leadership and how it is that, "*Youth are the future of the church.*" That is true, but the youth are also the church of today. They are children of God, loved no less by our heavenly father than people who are ten times their age. They are not second class believers. If we are planning and working toward raising up leaders, both clergy and lay leaders for the future, we ought to be about it earnestly and continuously. It is a revealing self-analysis for a congregation to do a bit of finger counting: how many pastors have served us since this congregation was formed? How many men have gone into the holy ministry from our congregation? For most congregations, the analysis is sobering. It gives a congregation a special sense of joy and blessing to hear about a son of the congregation who has been used as God's instrument in proclaiming the Good News to people and communities who have been blessed by their service to the Lord and His Church.

It is the stories of the heroes of our faith that inspires the growth of faith within us. For Timothy it was stories of Paul and Peter, James and John. For us, it may be our faith mothers and fathers who built the church we worship in and who put their hearts into the ministries we now carry on. We are standing on the shoulders of others. They may not have had the height or weight of physical giants, but their shoulders were wide enough for others to stand on them, and as a result, we were given the vision to plant, and to serve, and to feed, and to minister, all by the grace and strength that God provides.

In every case, we pray that the faith that *lived* in Paul and Timothy will live in us and in the children around us -- a sincere faith that will have an impact on our community and our wider world. An inviting faith that will become the hope of persons who have never really seen sincere faith in action. So many of the people in our world can't see over the crowds around them. They have not had faithful shoulders to stand on. They don't see any future that is any brighter than what they can make for themselves. If there is anxiety in our world, much of it has to be based on the belief that it all depends on me -- that my future happiness depends on me to find it and keep it.

Paul reminds us of the source of this ongoing blessing: [14] By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Sincere, authentic faith is a faith that lives within us, a faith that is nourished by God.

God desires to be the energy within us who makes our lives different and joyful in a way that people living apart from Christ just don't get. Have you ever described a believer as a person who has a certain "glow" about them -- that the way they look, and walk, and care gives their faces a special glow. If so, it may very well be that you are seeing the impacts of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us. Because we know and believe Part A (God FOR us), we live and breathe and love and serve because of Part B (God IN us). This motivation is both powerful and contagious. Almost every believer has seen God at work in the godly and wonderful people -- the people whose shoulders we have stood on -- the people whose vision and sight have inspired ours. People for whom we thank God. People about whom we wonder "Whatever would we have done without them?"

Many of the containers we buy and use have a 5 cent fee connected with them. Container or bottle deposits have been with us for a long time. It became a trade policy or a government fee imposed to ensure that the container was not discarded. It had value. It was made from material that has more than one life. It could be cleaned or melted down and used for our benefit again.

The Good News that we have and treasure is, in the best sense of the word, a deposit. While it can be squandered, it is designed to be cycled and recycled, and passed on from one person to another, from one generation to another. We know the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Very often our spiritual parents and grandparents have been God's instruments to introduce us to Jesus and then to grow in faith, love, and service. By God's grace, we may be able to do even more than they have. If that does happen, by the grace and blessing of God, it is because he have been blessed to stand on the shoulders of others. We thank God for each of them in Jesus' name.