

October 2nd, 2022

Year C; Proper 22

Lamentations 3: 19-26

2 Timothy 1: 1-14

Luke 17: 5-10

2 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.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

My Father’s memorial service last weekend followed the liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer Burial service. The words are beautiful, even poetic, and deeply comforting.

In the liturgy the deceased is referred to as “your servant”, and even more often, as “our brother”.

As I planned Dad’s service I paused at the use of “our brother”. In our small family Dad, Samuel Maroney, or Sam as he was called, was known as husband, father, grandfather and uncle, but he had had only one sister, who died several years ago, as had her first and second husbands.

Dad had not been called brother for years.

So, it seemed that it would be a little odd to refer to Dad as “our brother” throughout the service.

“For our brother Sam, let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ who said, ‘I am Resurrection and I am Life.’”

After both the memorial service, and the burial service that was held the next day, were completed, my step-mother, Mary Louise, commented to me about all the references to Dad in the service as “our brother”, and she asked if I had chosen that wording!

I quickly explained that the Book of Common Prayer refers to the deceased as brother/sister.

Half expecting a sigh and a demur criticism from my so kind and supportive step-mother, instead she exclaimed how much she loved all the references to Dad as “our brother”!

Mary Louise went on to say how it reminded her of how St. Francis called his fellow monks all “brother”, and that St. Clare, who followed St. Francis and learned from him, had the nuns she led call one another “sister”.

Mary Louise has long admired St. Francis and is a member of The Third Order of St. Francis, an Episcopal group, lay and ordained, connected by their study of and commitment to the principles of humility, love and joy that Francis taught.

So, Mary Louise was not just appreciating the references to “our brother” in the burial service; she heard there an echo of a community of faith she holds so dear.

In our reading today from 2 Timothy, Paul is writing to one of his closest followers and students, Timothy. Paul speaks of Timothy’s faith, a faith that did not begin with Timothy, but that was shared with him by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice.

Timothy has received a faith handed down from generation to generation, but not faith as a tightly wrapped parcel, all complete, but a faith which is alive, vibrant, breathing, and speaking to Timothy in new ways, unimagined by his grandmother and his mother.

And what about us? This passage from 2nd Timothy often elicits sighs and worries, as mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers worry over whether their children have received their faith, whether we have done a good enough job, or any job at all as we look at the children of our world today.

“Comfort us in our sorrows at the death of our brother, Sam; let our faith be our consolation, and eternal life our hope.”

Passing on the stories and creeds and details of our faith are all important. But if we pass along only those details in a tightly wrapped parcel, without sharing the living breathing faith of comfort, consolation, and hope, of our brother and savior Jesus with us in the darkness of the valleys and the hope and light of the mountain tops, well, without those, all we have handed on is a parcel, not our faith.

Our brothers and sisters, that language matters, as it reminds us that we are welcomed, connected, and equals. Our oh so human tendencies, yes, we can even call it our human sin, when it wanders off on its own, will create systems of in and out, belonging and excluding, rather than brothers and sisters.

When we pass along our faith to our children, yes, but also to those who come to Trinity or SMWC has newcomers, perhaps as the first church in their lives or after a lifetime in churches, in churches accepting of them or of churches that excluded or made them feel less than wanted.

When we pass along our faith, how we treat one and another matters the most, and speaks the loudest: a faith that is inviting, welcoming, and that makes room for all at the table.

Looking back to Timothy’s grandmother Lois and mother, Eunice, we see them as pillars, having taught Timothy so well, having shared their vibrant faith with him. And they clearly did! But we must remember that the path Timothy is on, as a follower and friend to the apostle Paul, was a path his grandmother and mother could never have imagined or hoped for!

Paul, who had been a persecutor of Christians, attacking and killing many, who then converted to Christianity, and was now an often-imprisoned leader of this small new faith. Paul offered a faith-filled but dangerous path for Timothy to take.

And as we enter the month of October, the month when we remember St. Francis and his care for all creation, we must remember too that Francis, as he called his followers brothers and invited them into a life of humility, love and joy, was also offering a radically different approach to the Christian faith.

Francis taught a respect and care not just for all his fellow humans, still a radical approach today, but Francis was the first to teach an equal regard and care for all of God's creation, the earth and all that inhabit it.

And in our gospel lesson today, Jesus' closest followers call out to him: "Increase our faith!" And Jesus offers them something tiny but hopeful and so alive, a seed, a mustard seed.

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother, Sam, and we commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless him and keep him, the Lord make his face to shine upon him and be gracious to him, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him and give him peace. Amen.

We, as Christians in the 21st century are called to offer our faith forward, to our children, to newcomers, to strangers, and to follow in the footsteps of Francis and teach radical love for all of God's creation, and in the footsteps of Timothy, and show willingness to show courage in our faith. And in all to offer always and first a living faith, a mustard seed, ready to burst forth into new life, for each new generation, for our sisters, and our brothers, for our brother Sam.

Amen.