

October 21, 2018 Ghost Stories Pt. 2 2 Timothy 1:1-12

Anniversaries are significant occasions. They are important in our family life. They are important to us personally, because they tend to be occasions on which we remember places we have been, time we have spent, and where we are in the present. They are also opportunities for considering the future. All of that said, it should not surprise us that anniversaries are also important in the Church of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you, you look good for a congregation that is 164 years old. And I will come back to that number.

We are in the midst of a short series on the presence and work, the reality of the experience and influence of the Holy Spirit of God, sometimes referred to as the Holy Ghost. I am at times amazed by the unfolding of history of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. The first minister of this congregation was present at the first General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. We possess a copy of the composite photograph of that historic Assembly, and we mark his presence.

In 1875, the basis of Union that brought a number of Presbyterian bodies together to form The Presbyterian Church In Canada required a willingness to subscribe to three articles: These were 1. A recognition of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the basis of doctrine, and the rule of faith and manners. 2. Acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith as defining faith in Jesus Christ, on the basis of the

Scriptures. And 3. Acceptance and a commitment to participate in the Presbyterian form of Church government which is fundamentally democratic, based on the election of leadership by people in the congregations, and where power lies in the principle of ministers and laity working together, the assumption being that such a church would thereby be dependent on God's presence, continually seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

On an anniversary Sunday, it is not a bad idea to remember and revisit such fundamentals. I want to be heard very clearly as recognizing that the sinfulness of man..... especially when ecclesiastical authority is within his or her grasp, can manage to frustrate a marvelous dream, and even the way and the will of God. Hence the lesson this morning from 2 Timothy chapter 1.

The apostle Paul remembers in the opening of this letter that Timothy's grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice were women of sincere faith. He tells Timothy in this letter's opening verses that he is convinced, persuaded, that Timothy has also come to sincere faith. It is for that reason that Paul dares to give a marvelous little piece of advice to the young man named Timothy. "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of hands." The Church recognized Timothy's faith in Jesus. The Church celebrated Timothy's faith in God. What they did as a result of that recognition, and in that celebration, was they laid their hands on Timothy and

prayed over him for the guidance, the indwelling, and the strength that would only be possible through the Holy Spirit of God.

I had the privilege of being present when Barbara was baptized as a young woman, and was received into the church by the laying on of hands and prayer. When I was ordained as a minister of Gospel by the Presbytery of Superior, they laid hands on me and prayed for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and HIS guidance of me in my years of ministry. We ordain men and women as elders to serve the Church in similar fashion. There is a wonderful awareness that service rendered unto God in Jesus name will only bear fruit, by the presence of God's Spirit in the individual, in the Church as a whole, and in the work itself.

But the marvelous piece of advice that Paul gives Timothy is something we all need to be eager to revisit time and time again. "Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you, through the laying on of hands." We cannot manipulate God's Spirit as we might wish to do. But we can fan the flame of faith in HIM, seeking HIS presence and grace. In the next week or so we will close down the farmhouse (our summer place) for the winter. In these cool days of the Fall we heat the farmhouse with a wood stove. Every time we start a fire in the stove it is cool in the house. We fan the flame that begins with paper, which spreads to the kindling, and finally takes to the wood that burns and warms the house. Just so in our lives as we seek

to serve God, in the fellowship of the Church. If things are to go according to the will of God, we need to fan the flame of faith, and the flame of the Spirit of God in our lives...as often as we are mindful of our dependence.

Much is made these days of the decline of the Church in Canadian life. And yet we have seemed to have a remarkable run. I describe us, thankful to the Lord above, as a happy church. The "Helping Hands Group" has reminded us what marvelous things can happen when we work together, led by the Spirit of God into work that we are convinced we should embrace. The Lift Project under the leadership of our Board of Managers. I once looked at the cost and said frankly, "Impossible! We are too small to do it." The framing is taking shape. The machine is in the hands of the installers. The money is in the bank. How did it become possible when it was so clearly impossible? The Holy Spirit of God. With God, nothing is impossible! With God's help...with God's blessing...nothing is....impossible.

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline." (2 Tim. 1:7)
Somewhere along the way, in the midst of the journey we became convinced this huge project that was going to cost 75 % of what we would think of as an annual budget, was something God wanted us to do. Some of us really need the lift, now. Some of us will need the lift. We became convinced that we needed to do this to assist those in need to be able to come

into this upper room and worship. And instead of being timid about it, we started looking for doors of opportunity, windows of assistance, and realistically analyzing what we could actually give to the project ourselves. And at some point we became convinced that with God's help we could do this. Because the Spirit we have been given is a Spirit of power and love and self-discipline. All three.

That the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power means miracles can happen. What we are tempted to think is impossible, becomes possible. Circumstances change. We change. When God is for us, who can stand against us. We have seen the power of God in our attempt at the work before us. And we have seen the love of God in the unfolding of the work before us. This project has involved the revelation that this was and is a way to make worship more accessible to people we have among us, and to people we may have among us in the future. And there has been self-discipline involved. At one point the decision we made together was to proceed only when the money was "in the bank." That decision involved a number of things. A willingness to proceed, for one. A willingness to embrace the project if the money came together. And there was a point where we had no idea how that might actually happen. We also knew the regular bills (and the biggest one is always paying a minister) the regular bills would still need to be met. Self discipline. We never once considered borrowing to achieve the project. Nor did we want to exhaust the savings we had put together over the last 7 years. Some would say we

were cautious. Some would say we were prudent. We exercised self-discipline. We did not just embrace it because we wanted it.

In a few weeks we will dedicate a lift. At the same time we are on target to meet our budget for the year. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and self-discipline." To God be the glory! So...Happy 164th Anniversary.

Let us Pray;

Lord forgive us where we placed limits on what faith in YOUR presence among us could accomplish. Continue, we pray to bless our efforts to give you the glory in the midst of our serving one another, in the midst of this community. Continue to use us, that your name might be glorified, that faith in Jesus might spread, that we might be more yielding to YOUR will. Make us sensitive to YOUR leading, make us a chorus of praise to YOUR name, make us humble servants among our neighbours. In Jesus name we pray. Amen