

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-18

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

Paul was a man who was letting go of his life. He sat in a jail cell, resembling more of a dungeon than a cell. It was poorly lit; it was cold and damp. He was chained to the wall and waiting...waiting to die. His execution was imminent and he was lonely.

As his thoughts began to wander, they centered on his close friend, someone who had been more like a son to him really. They had shared many experiences, both good and bad, together. The last image he had of his friend was of him weeping, so saddened had he been by Paul's departure. Now, as he sits in his cell, Paul longs to see his friend once more.

He sits down and decides to write him a letter. It would be a letter in which he would pour out his heart to his friend; telling him how much he loved him, encouraging him, building him up and informing him that he is now in charge of the work that they had shared together. It's time for his friend to take over and the work must not fail. The man writing the letter is the apostle, Paul. His friend is Timothy.

2 Timothy is such a dynamic letter, so authentic and genuine! Paul had been recently arrested in Rome under the orders of the Emperor, Nero who took great delight in the persecution and killing of Christians. Nero would be responsible for the deaths of both the apostle Paul and of Peter. This letter is written shortly before Paul's death.

So often we hear of people saying that they never got the chance to tell a loved one everything they wanted them to hear, before that person died. Paul wants to make sure he tells Timothy 'Everything on his heart' while he still has the chance. More than anything, the letter of 2 Timothy is a changing of the guard. Paul passes on the torch of ministry to Timothy.

One of the great spectacles of the Olympic Games is the passing of the torch, as we will experience later this week as the games begin in Tokyo. The passing is symbolic. One person has fulfilled his or her duties and responsibilities, and now they will be passed on to the next person, and so on and so on, until the work is completed.

Paul has finished his turn of carrying the torch of the gospel of Christ.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7) Now it is Timothy's turn to carry the torch and finish his leg of the race. Paul's words to Timothy were filled with principles, & sound, proven advice on how Timothy could be the most effective leader any Christian could be. Like Timothy, we are currently taking our turn at running with the torch of the gospel of Christ.

Our emphasis today centers around Paul's words in verse six, in which he tells Timothy to "fan into flame", the gift that he has received from God. Scholars have debated what this gift was, and it is commonly accepted that Timothy had a gift for ministry. He was capable of starting churches, teaching, preaching and evangelizing. Paul's message to Timothy is to fully express his gift, not hold anything back.

We all have a heritage. We can trace our families back to where they originated, knowing the careers they worked, and the lives they lived. Our ancestor's lives continue to shape our lives, even today. Our last names bear our ancestor's mark. Even our health is connected to them. Our family heritage gives us a complete picture of our identity, who we are and where we came from.

Likewise, as Christians, we all have a spiritual heritage, which consists of the people that introduced us to Christ, and have helped us to mature in our faith. For some, this heritage may be linked to a specific church or a minister, or even a teacher or a friend. Or, as in Timothy's case, spiritual heritage can come directly from our family. Paul says of Timothy, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

It was his mother and grandmother who taught Timothy about God. In his day, it was common for a Roman boy's mother to be his main formative influence up until the age of seven. Paul reminds Timothy that he comes from a great family of faith. Timothy needs to draw on his heritage of faith, for strength and guidance, in order to carry the torch of ministry that Paul is passing on to him.

Who makes up your spiritual heritage? Who was it that helped form your faith? Can you still go to those people in times of decision or crisis? Are they still active in your faith development today? Even more important than that is whose spiritual heritage are you a part of? Whose life are you impacting?

Besides Timothy's mother and grandmother, Paul made up a substantial piece of Timothy's spiritual heritage...so much so that he refers to Timothy as "my dear son". It's his spiritual heritage that will help Timothy fan into flame, his gift for ministry. Paul encourages him to develop his gift in verse six - "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."

The words "fan into flame" that Paul uses here, can also mean to "stir up" or "rekindle". The gift that God has given Timothy is like a fire burning inside of him. Paul wants Timothy to develop this gift, to intensify the fire within him, to be overcome with passion for this gift and to use it to its fullest potential.

Today, there is a fire code that helps distinguish the fire danger to the land. WIMS, the Weather Information Management System, collects various data and issues these ratings everyday.

A low risk is coded by the colour green, moderate risk by blue, high risk by yellow, and very high risk, meaning that the conditions are ripe for a fire to start and spread quickly, are indicated by the colour orange. An extreme warning is issued when conditions are present for a fire to start quickly, spread furiously and burn intensely. This is identified by the colour red.

Paul wants the fire in Timothy to be code red, so that his followers will burn intensely with a passion for serving Christ and accomplishing his mission. I Corinthians 7:7 tells us that "each person has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."

Timothy's gift for ministry was given to him by God through the laying on of Paul's hands. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that Timothy may have second-guessed this "gift" as he was known for having a spirit of timidity...he was shy and sensitive. Paul reminds Timothy that God has given him a new spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline."

Timothy would have had to take on a more authoritative role and rely completely on the power of God to sustain him. This may have proven to be difficult because of Timothy's age. He was likely in his thirties, yet still considered a youth in the faith. This is probably why Paul wrote "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him to carry on. The torch has been passed. Timothy must use his gift of ministry and persevere, if the Church is going to survive and grow.

We too can fan into flame the gifts that God has given us, by drawing on our spiritual heritage, developing our God-given gifts, and displaying a spirit of godliness. Let's, then, do everything in our power to develop our own unique gifts, so we can use them for service to God. Let's not waste what God has given us.

AMEN