

Title: Fanning the ember of faith
Text: 2 Timothy 1.1-7
Theme: Grace, mercy and peace produce many good things
Series: 2 Timothy #2
Prop Stmtnt: Fanning the ember of faith into a flame of conviction will produce joy.

This morning I have 3 audiences in view: 1) People who are investigating what it means to follow Jesus. There is a good bit, particularly at the beginning of this message for you. 2) Younger believers like Timothy who are being called upon to step up, lead and be ready for adversity. 3) Older believers like Paul who need to finish strong and with joy.

Read Text:

Earlier this past week, the news was dominated by the hunt for Steve Stephens, the man who was recorded on social media committing murder. By Monday evening his picture was on billboards as the public was asked to look out for him. Steve was a wanted and feared man. It is hard for us to imagine, but at one point the Apostle Paul had a similar reputation. Saul, as he was known then, was a hateful, violent and relentless persecutor of the early followers of Jesus, until Jesus hijacked his life and turned him from being an enemy into being a friend. Although there is no account of it, I think that it is possible, given all of Paul's travels that at certain points he met people and their family members he had persecuted. Humanly speaking, he had a lot of regret. There were many things in his past that he could have been buried under.

How can a man who was so hateful, vengeful, violent and even murderous, get to the end of his life and not be consumed by regret, remorse, depression, and anxiety? How can he, after all that he did have a clear conscience (v.3)? You can too. The answer is found in verse 2.

At the beginning of this letter that Paul is writing to Timothy he greets him by saying, "*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*" It is not only the same greeting that he used in his first letter to Timothy; it is essentially the same greeting that Paul uses in every one of his letters. But, when Paul says this, he is not parroting customary clichés as we tend to do when we see someone. (e.g. "Hey, how ya doin?") Every word is intentional. When Paul greets Timothy he greets him with a prayer asking for Timothy to know and experience grace, mercy and peace because Paul recognizes something.

I. **Everything is about the gospel.** (1-2)

Here is what I mean. Notice these three words, "grace, mercy and peace." These words, while often misunderstood are theological and personal dynamite. Let me explain:

12 mile road has a speed limit of 45. If you are driving it at 55, you are speeding and if one of Roseville's finest pulls you over and gives you a ticket for going 10 over, you are getting justice. (**Justice – Getting what is deserved**) You are getting what you deserved.

In your mind, you may be angry that the officer is wasting time giving you a ticket when the officer could be chasing down actual bad people, but the truth is, if you are going 10 over, you are a lawbreaker. Getting a ticket is absolutely fair. If, however, instead of giving you a ticket for going 10 over, the officer lets you off with a warning, that is NOT fair. That is not just. That is called mercy. Mercy is NOT getting what you deserve.

(Mercy: Not getting what is deserved) If, however, the officer instead of giving you a ticket, not only lets you off with a warning, but gives you a \$250 gift card to Sam's Club, you would not know what to think. You really do not have a category in your brain for that, but that is what grace is. Grace is being given something that you do not deserve.

(Grace: Getting what is not deserved).

This is hard, but necessary to hear. In fact, this is a major stumbling block for people who are investigating what it means to follow Jesus. The hard truth is that you are a sinner. You may be a sophisticated sinner, you may consider yourself to not be as bad as all those hypocrites in church, or terrorists, but you are a sinner. You are not a sinner because you sin, you sin because you are a sinner. You do things that you think are fine, but are in fact, in rebellion to God. For example, if you are sleeping with anyone other than whom you are married to you, you are living in sin. What I just said is shocking and disturbing and feels judgmental to some of you. But, I am simply repeating what God has said. I know that hooking up is what "everyone is doing" or living with your girlfriend is perfectly normal in our culture. However, the angel Gabriel is not reading the warnings in the Bible about this issue and going to God and saying, "*Hey God, we really need to rethink this one about sex outside of marriage, cause, it's like everyone down there is doing it. It's just not a big deal anymore. There are probably more important things, like global warming and universal health care right?*" God doesn't change his law just because we have become very skilled and adept at sinning. What would happen if basically the entire world rejected God's law and authority? Ask Noah or read the book of Revelation. God doesn't change his moral compass. He is righteous and we are not. We are rebels at heart who want to live without God telling us what to do.

Therefore, if God were to judge us for our sins, we would receive a punishment that we could not handle. That punishment is called hell. As grievous as hell is, and it is, it is an expression of the justice of God. But, because God is merciful and because he loves to express that mercy, God did for us, what we could not do for ourselves. God sent us a Savior. God sent us Christ. Christ is the Son of God and God, the Son. As God, he was an infinite being. By coming to earth and becoming a man, he was an infinite being who became one of us, so that he could pay for our sins by dying for them. The death of Christ paid for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him. So, turn from your rebellion and trust him. When you do, you receive mercy, meaning, you do not get what you deserve because Christ took what you deserved in your place. Christ took your punishment. Christ took your death. When you trust in Christ, you not only get mercy, you get grace. You get what you do not deserve. You get credited with the life of Christ. You get eternal life. You get adopted into the family of God. You get an eternal inheritance. You get a new standing, a new position, and a new identity that can never be taken away. You have a new standing and an unbreakable promise by the God who cannot lie that you will enjoy life together with God and his people forever. In other

words, you know that one day, everything, will work out, fine. If you know that everything is going to work out fine, you have peace. You are at peace with God because of Christ and you have peace because you know that you are at peace.

God's gift of salvation through Christ is grace. We cannot earn grace. (Another obstacle for people. We want to earn it somehow, but we cannot pay for grace. We cannot achieve grace. We cannot merit grace. We can only receive grace by accepting it through faith in Christ. That is why we call grace, saving grace. God's grace saves us from the penalty of sin and every person who receives saving grace also receives grace to grow as a follower of Christ. This is called sanctifying grace. God's grace saves every single person who trusts in him and God's grace keeps every single person who trusts in him. As Newton wrote, "*his grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*"

But, it's not just you. God's plan is not only to provide you with a new relationship to him, but to also provide you with a new, eternal, personal and satisfying relationship with others, who are also in Christ. Paul calls Timothy his beloved child, not because Timothy is actually his son (he isn't) but because as two men who are in Christ, they have a profoundly deep relationship that because of their age difference is like a good father/son relationship. This is seen in verses 3-5.

II. **Deep relationships are made and grown in Christ.** (3-5)

Think about this. Why does God warn us so much about sin? For one, it is deeply offensive to his character, but there is more. Sin is so destructive to relationships. One of the worst things about alcoholism or drug addiction is the crushing loneliness that it brings. For almost 40 years I watched a person in my extended family live in bondage to alcohol. This gal destroyed every relationship she had and when she died, her kids chose not to have a funeral because no one knew her and sadly, the few who did, did not miss her. Do you see how kind it is for God to warn us to stay away from sin? Instead of isolation and loneliness, the language of verses 3-5 is the language of deep friendship. Grace, mercy and peace not only gives you a relationship with God, but "in Christ" you have the capacity for deep relationships with other believers. (repeat #2)

Remember that these are the closing days of Paul's life. At some point someone has probably asked you that if you knew you only had 1 day to live, what would you do? That is the sense of this letter. We hear the condition of Paul's heart and we hear what is important to him. And what is it that we hear? We hear thanksgiving.

Paul is grateful for Timothy (v.3). This young man traveled extensively with Paul and together they experienced some wonderful evidences of God's grace as well as some serious challenges. They had a lot of history together and it was not only personal, it was in Christ. They shared a deep affection for one another because they shared a love for Christ, his church and the gospel. Paul told the believers at Philippi that no one would care for them like Timothy would. Paul knows that Timothy is the real deal. Paul is reminded of Timothy's faith and the sincerity of it and can rejoice that Timothy was influenced by his mom and grandmother. (Note of encouragement to single moms or

spiritually single moms and grandparents). But, Timothy had to believe it himself. You may be raised attending church, but you have to believe this for yourself. “sincere faith” There are obviously hypocrites. There were then, there are now.

Timothy cared for Paul so much that he not only traveled with him, but he represented Paul and took on challenging job assignments (like addressing the problems at the church in Ephesus). Timothy meant the world to Paul. Timothy was such a source of encouragement to him, and Paul prayed for him, constantly, he says, night and day. Paul was constantly thinking of others and prayed for them, which meant that he was always thinking of others. And therefore, Paul missed him. *“I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy.”*

Do you have anyone in your life who you can talk about like that, or can anyone talk like that about you? Paul remembers Timothy’s tears. Timothy obviously has deep affection for Paul as well. This man has meant the world to him, and the care is mutual.

Paul and Timothy took risks together for the gospel and part of the fruit of that was a deep, rewarding, and joy-giving friendship. The person, who lives as if he does not need anyone or doesn’t want to need anyone, or doesn’t want anyone to need him or her, does not understand Christianity. God made you incomplete and your completeness in Christ is experienced in part as the body of Christ helps you and you help others become what God has intended. That comes through deep friendships. Some of you have good friendships because you practice being a good friend. Here are some things that I have observed from some of you in our church family.

- 1) You take the initiative to invite people into your life.
- 2) You ask good questions about others. (i.e. you talk to them about them)
- 3) You pray for others.
- 4) You stay in touch with them.
- 5) You do things that are expressions of care.
- 6) You do “risky” things together, like mission trips.
- 7) You serve together in ministries and you do more than show up, you invest!

You live out what it means to be a bag of grapes, instead of a bag of marbles. (pic) There are so many of you who are like that. Last Sunday after the service, I stood in the Gathering Space and watched and listened to so many of you who were just talking and sharing and getting caught up with one another. Here is what I saw. I saw a whole bunch of people who know that church is not over when we sing the final song.

Now, there are some of you who say (or think), “You know what, if I ever died, or if I ever stopped coming around, I don’t think anyone would ever miss me.” Did it ever dawn on you, that if that is the case, that it is not their fault, but yours? If you live like Scrooge, you need a “come to Jesus moment.”

Paul knows the quality of faith in Timothy. Timothy has served Paul and has served with Paul. But Paul has always been the tip of the spear. Paul has been the controversial one.

Paul has taken the brunt of the conflict, but now Paul is sidelined in prison and is about to die. Timothy will move from Paul's shadow into a position of prominence. The arrows that were aimed and fired at Paul will now have their sights set on Timothy.

The reason why Paul is sitting in prison is because he was faithful to the message of the gospel and he knows firsthand that faithfulness to the gospel is like wearing a bulls eye on your back. As far as our world is concerned, it is always hunting season for genuine Christians. And so, Paul knowing what is at stake and knowing the cost and knowing the reward, calls upon Timothy to "be bold." And right here in verses 6-7, we are given what serves at the primary theme of this letter which connects the personal of Paul and Timothy to Timothy's calling as follower of Christ and minister of the gospel.

III. **Be bold!** (6-7)

When Paul tells Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, he is not telling Timothy to go out in this spirit of power and claim a new job, claim victory over a disease, or claim victory over your enemies, etc. Ironically, Paul is actually telling Timothy and us that God gives us a spirit of power, love and self-control in order to embrace suffering and embrace those who suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul tells us this because embracing suffering and embracing those who suffer for the sake of the gospel is counterintuitive. Verses 6-7 are the fruit of v.2.

We will look at this more in depth next week, but here is a quick overview of this theme because this is the ribbon that flows through this book.

Paul is not ashamed to suffer for the sake of Christ and the gospel. 1.12
Timothy should share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 2.3
Paul suffers for the gospel. 2.9
Timothy has seen firsthand Paul's sufferings and persecutions. 3.11
Everyone who lives godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 3.12
Be ready to endure suffering. 4.5

I told you as we worked through I Timothy, that I think Timothy is unfairly labeled as being prone to timidity or weakness. I do not read these verses (6-7) and think that Paul is worried about Timothy's shyness and is trying to get him to be bold. No, I think that Paul is at the end of his life and realizes the cost of faithfulness and wants Timothy to be ready. Following Christ is difficult. Adversity is coming and you need to be ready. And what Paul is telling Timothy, I am telling you. Adversity is coming. Do not be surprised by it. Do not think that because you follow Christ that you are now immune from problems. If you are a follower of Christ, you are asking for trouble. The wind of the world is now in your face. Your world will not cheer you as you follow Christ.

A. **Act on the promises of God.** (6)

Paul does not say what the "gift of God" is. I think it is actually referring to Timothy's profession of faith. The laying on of hands here is by Paul and not by the elders

(I Timothy 4.14). The point is that Timothy has been given a gift, either of salvation or of gifting for gospel ministry and he has responsibility to bank on what he has been given and to use it. Timothy is to fan it into a flame. In other words, just as you would blow on a hot ember in a fire pit, in an effort to get it to catch something on fire, Timothy is to use this gift from God in such a way that it “catches on fire” that is, it clearly makes a difference. I take this, therefore to mean that we are to fan our ember of faith (gospel) into a flame of action.

Learn the promises of God (Word). Pray, sing, preach to yourself and remind others of them. Act on them. E.g. Psalm 23.6 – look for God’s goodness and mercy. Living that way prepares you for facing adversity.

Let’s say that in 3 years a doctor is going to inform you that your child has an incurable disease. How would you prepare now, for that day? Or, let’s say that in 3 years, your job is going to be eliminated. How would you prepare your heart now, for that day? What if you knew that in 3 years you are going to be sued or that your house will catch fire and burn down. How would you prepare today for that day? What if in 3 years, you are told that in order to keep your job, you have to reject your faith in Christ. How would you prepare today, for that day?

Adversity is coming. Many of you are in it. Paul was in it and was preparing Timothy and us for it. You have to act now, on the promises of God. But, what exactly does that mean? How do you do that? Read and pray the Word and read and pray the Word with others.

Adversity is more than a threat to our personal comfort. One of the reasons we fear adversity is that we fear loneliness. We fear that people will not want to be around us or want to be our friend because our adversity will be such a drain on them, and we don’t want to be such a bother to other people. Adversity has an element of shame to it. But, should it? No. But, in order for me to think rightly about adversity, I need to think rightly about Christ and the gospel. I need to remember that I am perfectly and eternally loved by Christ, no matter what. I am prone to forget that. So, I need to read God’s Word and pray God’s Word so that I am being reminded of his promises and by praying them I am acting upon them. What is even better is when I do that with others and others do that with me.

There are brothers in this church who regularly text me or email me promises from God’s Word. Some guys will leave me voice messages telling me that they are praying for me or will share something they read in a book or read from Scripture. Over and over I am reminded that I am not alone. By doing this, these brothers are not only encouraging me, but they are fanning their own ember of faith into a flame. Verse 7 begins with the word “for”. It is the reason why we fan the ember of faith into a flame of action.

B. God has provided what you need (7)

Our natural reaction to adversity is fear, and we instinctively feel powerless and prone to anger and bitterness and even rage. Many of you have seen, in recent years, t-shirts,

stickers, even tattoos that say “No Fear”. The image that is being sold is that I am so tough that nothing fazes me. I have no fear. But, the anger that is simmering beneath the surface is saying otherwise, right? That attempt at not being afraid is like trying too hard. If you have to advertise to others that you have no fear, it’s probably because you have fear, or at least a form of it in anger. Steve Stephens was full of fear and anger and murdered an innocent man. Steve ran for his life and ended up killing himself. No real power, no love, no self-control, no hope.

As believers, we have something much better.

God, by means of his Spirit and Word has given us a supernatural means by which even though we are tempted to give in to fear and tempted to be embittered, the truth is that we can stand up to adversity with a strength that is not our own, without being embittered by the conflict, but instead loving those who are attacking us and even exercising a self-control that reflects Christ. When you fan the ember of your faith into a flame, God provides strength to stand up under the pressure, love to be concerned about others, and self-control that keeps you calm, though it may look like your world is coming apart.

This week, the Lord called Bess Kypros home to heaven. Bess’ first bout with cancer was 55 years ago. I say first, because her life has been characterized by fighting this disease. Many of you know that Bess and George had a special needs son. In addition to the multiple and complex challenges he presented for many years, that he died suddenly a number of years ago. Bess has lived with many weighty issues that so many people would be devastated by. But, to know her was to know someone who was kind, humble, considerate, persevering, engaging, and yes, joyful. God gave her a spirit of power, love and self-control. Bess had more opportunities than most of us to be consumed by fear, but she wasn’t. She regularly fanned the ember of her faith into a flame of conviction and her joy in the journey was the result.