

ARE YOU TIMID ABOUT YOUR FAITH?

(2 Timothy 1:5-7)

It is always exciting, I think, to remember that we are the people of God in this place, trying to witness to the grace of God in our lives...and as such we are part of a movement that is worldwide. We are not just a small community group that meets here every week, but we are one small part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that is meeting all over the world today and that has been meeting this way for nearly 2,000 years. In this connection, we do something very significant today because this is World Communion Sunday. Holy communion is always significant for us. Here we come to the altar and receive a little bread, a little wine which bring with them all that Jesus means to us in the way of faith and hope and love...and security and confidence and commitment. In this little meal Jesus becomes our Lord again, whatever this past week has been like for us, and we become his servants again, and we are humbled in repentance, but we are also lifted up to live before him in confidence and gladness.

Today this meal is even more special because this is World Communion Sunday, when we celebrate the fact that water is thicker than blood. That is, the water of our baptism is more powerful than the blood-lines of our genealogies in connecting us to people all over the world as brothers and sisters. This is why we pray and care for people who are far away, this is why we send money to help people who are across the seas and who speak a different language – they are not foreigners and strangers to us, they are our brothers and sisters. We are an international people here, we welcome people from every nation and from everywhere. It's called mission, it's called church, it's called Christ.

In Christ there is no East or West,
In him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth. (*ELW*, 560)

We are part of that one great fellowship of love. The church, as we learn to say in our Creed, is catholic – that doesn't mean Roman Catholic, it means universal. We are not an American club here, here we are the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. And today especially we are glad about that! What we do today Christians all over the world are doing today – we are doing together the very thing that makes us one, celebrating the gift of Jesus' life and

teaching, his death and resurrection in bread and wine, celebrating his lordship in our lives and in our homes and in our church. It is the most important, the most significant thing that we ever do here!

I want to talk briefly about Paul and Timothy. I like the way Paul talks to Timothy about his faith - it sounds so familiar. It is a passed-down faith, handed down from generation to generation. How did you become a Christian? Most of us would answer, I suppose: The faith was passed down to me from my parents, who received it from their parents, etc. It's interesting that, even in his patriarchal society, Paul traces the faith from grandmother (Lois) to mother (Eunice) to son (Timothy). Here it is the "faith of our mothers" rather than the "faith of our fathers," and sometimes that's how it works, still today. But the time comes when this handed-down faith becomes my own. I take what my parents give me and make it my own – I internalize it, we say, I own it. It dwells in us, Paul says. I move from the what-I-have-been-taught stage to the what-I-believe stage, not all at once but gradually, and continually through life. How are you doing with that? It's called growing in faith. Sunday School classes and the confirmation process and adult Bible classes are meant to help that happen, and we are very much in the midst of all that again now that the fall season has begun.

Sometimes parents say, I don't want to force the faith on my children, I want them to be free to make their own choices. Is that really how it works, do you think? The English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was talking once with a man who said that to him, said he didn't believe in giving his children any religious instruction because he didn't want to prejudice their minds. Coleridge at first said nothing, but later he invited the man to see his garden. He took him first to the part of the garden where only weeds were growing, and the man said to him, "Why, this is not a garden, there is nothing but weeds here." "Well, you see," answered Coleridge rather facetiously, "I did not wish to infringe on the liberty of the garden. I wanted to give the garden a chance to express itself and choose its own production."

Our task as parents is not to let our children grow wild but to give them what they need so they can become a garden, to pass on to them our faith to

nurture and shape them, to teach them the way of the Lord, and to plant the seeds of goodness in them so that the garden of their mature years may show the fruitfulness of good planting. It isn't a matter of prejudicing them and taking away their freedom, it's a matter of giving them something to work with and something to build on.

This is no easy task. Paul tells Timothy to guard against unsound words, words that speak lies about who we are and why we are and how we are. We hear much these days about conspiracy theories that many even prominent people are falling for, theories that speak lies about what is going on in our nation/world and that rouse them to anger and conflict. The author Neil Postman warns that even many television commercials do that, they become a kind of "body of sacred texts" around which many people organize their lives. But they are unsound words because often they speak lies to us about who we are and why we are and how we are. They teach us to believe in ourselves . . . but not in God. They teach us to believe in consumption . . . but not in service. They teach us to believe in wealth...but not in generosity and charity. They teach us to believe in youth and glamour and novelty . . . but not in experience and tradition. They teach us to believe in amusement . . . but not in learning. They teach us to believe in lazy-minded simplicity . . . but not in critical thought and judgment. In short, television commercials teach us to worship Baal . . . but they do not help us to worship God. Paul says to Timothy, and to us: guard against unsound words (that's a family job), guard the faith, don't be ashamed of it, and don't be timid about it.

How shall we get over our timidity? First, we must recognize it isn't God who gives us a spirit of timidity, but it's that other spirit, the evil one, the one who gives also the spirit of anger and fear and defensiveness. We must recognize that we don't get our timidity from God. And then we may open up to the spirit God gives us, open up to the power and confidence, the love and compassion, the self-control and self-care that God gives us. We may loosen up, cast off our religious timidity, wear our faith confidently and well, and not be afraid to tell people why we hope as we do, even when life turns bad, why we believe as we do, even when the signs all point the other way, why we love as we do, even when people don't deserve it. This is our faith, handed down from grandparents and parents but now made our own, now dwelling in us. It is our faith in Jesus, and our communion with Jesus, that gives

us power and confidence, love and compassion, self-control and self-care to replace our timidity.

It was no timid Jesus, you know, who went to the cross, it was a Jesus who carried that hope and faith and love with him all the way. He wasn't timid about it, and God did not disappoint him. God won't disappoint you and me either. We bet on Jesus. We believe he is the way and the truth about our life. We are not timid about our faith in him. And today we celebrate his victory, the victory of his life and lifestyle, and even the victory of his death . . . we celebrate the victory of Jesus together with Christians all over the world. This is the feast of victory for our God! That's what we say every time.

So you see, It is very important, very significant . . . what we do here today!

Pastor Phil Schroeder

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