

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor  
January 24 2010  
Glendale Lutheran Church

FAN INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD

2 Timothy 1:1-7

I.

Throughout the church year there are certain “minor festivals” designated rather arbitrarily on a specific date. Today, January 24, is known as “St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor.” Timothy was quite young when he first met the Apostle Paul, probably a teenager. But already he had been blessed with a strong, living mature faith in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. So impressed was Paul that he took Timothy with him on his missionary journeys and, later, Timothy – still a young man by most standards – became a pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul loved Timothy, even calling him “my dear son.”

He had mentored this young missionary, and he wrote at least two pastoral letters to Timothy, which were intended not only for him but to be circulated through the church-at-large. In one, he penned, “As for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14-16)

A) Timothy, as you lead the church, don’t get caught up in the ‘business’ of the church so much that you lose the focus of your ministry – preaching and teaching the Word simply and soundly. For sure,

Timothy, don't get caught up with yourself and your own sense of importance – echoing the words of Jesus, God has placed you in ministry “not to be served but to serve.” But that's where the similarity ends: there can be no ‘messianic’ complex in pastoral ministry. Have passion for the Gospel and compassion for people. Listen to them, learn from them and with them, and above all, love them and humbly receive their love for you.

B) And, Timothy, don't neglect to have your own faith nurtured – through prayer, through study, through devotion... “CONTINUE in what you have learned and have become convinced of.” You've learned a lot, and you always have a lot to learn. Just when you think you have this ‘ministry thing’ mastered, some situation or person will come along – not coincidentally but sent from God himself – who will humble you, big time. “Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you.”

I love that imagery. Note the singular “gift of God which is in you.” All of Timothy's other talents and blessings and even spiritual gifts revolve around that one: the gift of knowing and believing in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. The gift of knowing and believing that Jesus has paid for his sins on Calvary's cross and has proclaimed victory over sin's death through resurrection. The gift of knowing and believing that long before he was called to be a leader in the church he was first called to be a child of God, solely by God's grace and love.

**FAN INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD.** Blow fresh breath into your sometimes smoldering faith. In faith, receive daily the Holy Spirit who shall give you courage and joy and zeal for the proclamation of the

Gospel. For, as Paul wrote, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.”

C) Oh, and one final thing, Timothy, don’t forget WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED and neither forget FROM WHOM YOU LEARNED IT.

From infancy, he had been taught the faith through his mother and grandmother. And it was a faith which was not just taught, but caught, through example as well as words. Did you note Paul’s words, “I have been 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.”

## II.

Believe me, these words of encouragement and admonition which Paul offered to Timothy are not just for YOUNG pastors, but for ALL pastors, without a shadow of a doubt, THIS pastor. They fit all persons who are called to be servants of the church, including this day Sue Schmidt in her teaching ministry at CCLS. Truth be told, they fit all of us who are part and parcel of being “church.”

A) Members of the church, leaders of the church, don’t get so preoccupied with the ‘business’ and ‘busyness’ of the church that we neglect why and for what it is that we have been brought and bound together: to rejoice and celebrate the presence and power of God’s boundless grace through Jesus. That’s central, that’s critical, and all else we do needs to reflect that saving Gospel. Just as importantly, we have been called to servanthood, whether that is being a teacher, or president, or elder, or making quilts.

B) Don't neglect to nurture and grow in your own faith, however old or young you are, through corporate worship and study of the Word and participation in the Sacrament, you bet! May that always be the lifeblood, the flagship of our church's life together. But, also in your own home, your own families, your own lives, your own prayer and devotional life. I know how difficult that is at times. I also know that when a person's faith is not fed, faith becomes more fragile, lethargic, even. And, when a church's faith is not fed, that church's life becomes fragile, even lethargic.

C) Finally, remember with thanksgiving those who taught you the faith in the first place. More likely than not, like Timothy, your mother or father or grandmother or grandfather, for whom faithful worship and learning was neither an option nor an obligation but an OPPORTUNITY to grow in the faith. You parents – especially those of you who face the challenges of small children – you who take that seriously are to be affirmed, glad-handed, high-fived, supported and encouraged. For the priority you have set today, while your children are impressionable and eager to learn of Jesus, will more likely than not ensure that the Gospel will be carried into yet another generation.

If children are 'the future of the church,' it will happen only if and when they have been given the tried-and-true message that God loves them no matter what, as we have been given; that God has called them to be GOD'S CHILDREN, special and unique and beloved, as God has called us; that God is with them and has been, from the very start of their journey of faith throughout their lifetimes, and God has been and is with us; and, for all of us, that a lifetime of faith is well worth hanging in there for an eternity of life in heaven.

### III.

Unlike Paul and Timothy, my own father did not encourage me to become a pastor, following in his footsteps. Hindsight says that he did not discourage, but only to say to me – prophetically, “Steve, life in and as the church will be different for you than it has been for me; the challenges of being a pastor will be different as well.” I often wish I could have sought his advice during my early years as a pastor, but he died three months after he ordained me. He might have added (for he was a man of vision) that society will change, culture will change, people will change, families will change, people’s attitude toward the church and clergy will change, but their – and your, and your family’s – spiritual hungering and thirsting will remain changeless.

I didn’t listen terribly well then, but I’ve been listening ever since, listening to his advice that I memorize a phrase which would be sung at my ordination and at the installation of the three churches I have had the privilege of serving, and which ought to be boldly placed on every Sunday School room, every room at CCLS, every nursery, and every refrigerator at home and which will be sung as we celebrate together the Sacrament today: EACH AGE ITS SOLEMN TASK MAY CLAIM BUT ONCE; MAKE EACH ONE NOBLER, STRONGER THAN THE LAST.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.