

Laura Smith Conrad

Fort Hill Presbyterian Church

**2 Timothy 1:1-14**

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

1:2 To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1:3 I am grateful to God--whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did--when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

1:4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

1:6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands;

1:7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

1:8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God,

1:9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to God's own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

1:10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1:11 For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,

1:12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1:14 Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

**Communion Meditation**

Today we read a 2000 year old personal letter from Paul to young Timothy.

And you may be wondering, so what does this have to do with us, preacher?

Well, I am glad you asked.

I think Paul and Timothy's relationship is a model for how we can be church together.

For we all learn faith from persons who embody and live the faith.

We grow disciples in families and community.

Paul is part of Timothy's faith family.

In some ways, Paul, the elder mentor is saying to Timothy, "Remember who you are and whose you are."

Notice a few things about this intimate letter.

First, Paul calls him "my beloved child." I hope you have known yourself to be such- a beloved child, no matter your age. Are we not all more motivated and inspired by love than rebuke? Paul "speaks the truth to Timothy in love." He cares that Timothy is going through a hard time as a church leader. Some believe Timothy was the first Bishop in the church at Ephesus. And I am sure he saw the challenges of a new movement organizing themselves around God's mission. From last Sunday's scripture, we know there has been disruption caused by false teachers, even some members of the church taking advantage of the vulnerable members. Paul knows that Timothy cannot help but suffer personally when the church is at odds. And Paul speaks to Timothy with empathy and love.

Just this week, in our Feasting on the Word Wednesday group, the Scripture prompted some of us to reflect on times when there has been disunity or trouble in our church family. Every church has those times.

Paul's letter to Timothy reminds us that we are just like those early churches and every church since. I find great comfort in that.

But conflict or challenge can be an opportunity for growth. Let's face it, not many of us thrive on conflict, and it is painful for those who care so deeply about one another. One person shared how painful it was when the going got tough, some just up and left. And those who felt their loss of relationship were hurt. Their commitment to a congregation was about loving the people in your faith family- especially when it is hard.

Like a coach, a good teacher, or big brother Paul encourages,

"God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled." (2 Timothy 1:7, CEV)

Like any real family, getting along and living together can be challenging. All of us have that weird cousin, crazy uncle, or loud, over-sharing aunt who embarrasses us sometimes.

God's strength shows best in our weakness.

God's power at work is most evident when we are inadequate or admit our wrong.

God's love is most beautiful, when it reconciles and creates relationship in spite of difficulties.

God's grace is sufficient when we cannot see the way forward.

Finally, I think Paul's letter to Timothy reminds us that faith family is a family where we can bother each other anytime. And we should. Catherine Goodrich writes about a time she felt her family was a bother in church.

Several years ago, when their kids were still pretty young and wiggly, they had a particularly bad Sunday in worship. They rattled papers, squirmed, and dropped more than one Matchbox car.

They were still fairly new to the community, so they were especially uncomfortable to be the family causing such a disruption in church. Her husband and Catherine cringed their way through, our convictions about how important it is to have our kids in worship taking a beating. Catherine writes,

*After the service, an older woman who I knew, but not well, approached us rather purposefully. I tensed a bit, thinking I knew exactly what was coming.*

*She surprised me, though. Instead of some genteel passive aggressive comment, or an outright rebuke, she reached out to me, put her hand on my arm, and said **"I am so glad y'all are here today."** Caught off guard, I stammered something about being sorry for being so unruly...And she laughed.*

*Then she surprised me again. She looked at me, with tears in her kind eyes, and she said, **"Honey, I can remember a time when it was too quiet in here. You keep coming back, and don't you worry. Y'all can bother me anytime."***

*Catherine continues,*

*Some of the most significant moments of my life of faith have come in those times when I have felt the gentle cinching of that tie that binds.<sup>i</sup>*

What a wonderful reminder of the faith that is taught to us, modeled for us by the Eunices, the Loises, the Pauls in our faith family, who say it and mean it, "Y'all can bother me anytime."

We can bother with children.

We can bother with grumpy old guys, with the person who gets on our nerves, and the one with whom we disagree because we are not here solely by our own volition.

Think about who is a part of your faith family.

Remember their names with thanks.

We have been called together, to be the body of Christ, by the unfathomable grace of God. And membership in this body is not a reward for our perfect Christian character or our fitting a mold, we are entrusted with a gift of faith.

And that faith is deep enough and wide enough for each of us here today, and those not here yet.

That family inheritance, that trust, was given to us, not earned.

And life in this body is just not perfect or easy or instant.

In our busy, chaotic world, we hear a message, do what feels good and take what you need. In faith, we commit to it, nurture it, give to it, and tend it.

Building relationships intentionally, built on the love of Jesus Christ, is a slow, deliberate investment of time, energy, and love.

Study of Scripture, prayer, acts of love and service, youth group or lesson planning, and leading a team takes time, energy, love. That trust of faith us a gift.

Just as our own bodies show the traits of our inherited DNA, we are who we were created to be.

The good Lord knows I prayed that I would not get the Smith family ears or the skinny chicken legs, but I got them anyway.

We grow to not only accept our imperfections, but to love them, grateful for God's good sense of humor.

The Body of Christ is richer because of the variety and differences, not in spite of them.

**And on this World Communion Sunday we celebrate God's goodness and the good news that the Unity of the church is not dependent on us.**

It is a given because we all belong to Jesus Christ.

Sometimes our disunity is indicative of our sin made manifest.

This division is not new, and it is precisely why we gather around this Table regularly.

Back in 1933, when World Communion Sunday was first conceived in one lone Presbyterian church, the world was as fractured as it had ever been.

That year saw Adolf Hitler's rise and consolidation of power in Nazi Germany, and a second great war in Europe was becoming more and more inevitable.

It was also the worst year of the Great Depression, with Americans and people around the world in financial despair.

By 1940, when the day was approved by the Federal Council of Churches, the war had begun in Europe.

World Wide Communion Sunday, as it was originally called, attempted to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity during an extremely turbulent time.

Today, celebrating the sacrament of the Lord's Table together reminds us of this ideal of unity, despite our differences between denominations and within our own denomination. The richness of the diversity may be evident in some places but harder to spot in others. Nevertheless, it's present everywhere.

Around the table on this day will be folks who disagree with one another about many things, including theological, cultural and personal issues;

but on this day, around this table, and collectively with Christians in churches throughout the world, we are united as one.

We may seem so deeply fractured, but this ideal of unity, however elusive, is still present and a Sovereign God is still moving in our world to make us one in Christ.

In the words of Ephesians 4:4-6, World Communion Sunday reminds us that **“you are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.”**

If I were writing a love letter to you, Fort Hill Church, these are a few of the things I would say to you. First, know that you are beloved and called to Christ's service. This is who and whose we are. Secondly, give thanks for the mentors in our faith family: the Pauls, the Eunices, the Loises, who show us by their example what it means to belong to God. I am so grateful they bother with us.

And lastly, we take courage, that even in divisions, disruptions, and chaos of our times, God is faithful still.

This has been true during hard times in the past, is true today, and will be true tomorrow — no matter what. As Paul wrote,

***I know the one in whom I've placed my trust. I'm convinced that God is powerful enough to protect what he has placed in my trust ...*** (2 Timothy 1:12b, CEV)

That treasure of faith.

Great is God's faithfulness!

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Catherine Goodrich, “Please Bother Me” blog post at <https://macedonianministry.org/please-bother-me/>