

Rev. Andi Fox
 October 6, 2019
 United Church of Broomfield

2 Timothy 1:1-14

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

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

3I 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. 4Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 5I 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. 6For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of hands; 7for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

8Do 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, 9who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, 10but 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. 11For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 12and 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. 13Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

First, I'd like to thank Pastor Michael and everyone here at the United Church of Broomfield for having me here today. My name is Andi Fox, and I'm a Presbyterian pastor who lives down in Lakewood. I got the chance to meet some of you while I was interviewing and more of you last night at the Casino fundraiser. I look forward to meeting everyone else in the next few months. I look forward to getting to know you, hearing your stories, and--God and congregation willing after the service--minister alongside you.

Just so y'all know, I don't normally talk about myself a lot in sermons; and there is a personal story coming up in the sermon. But, this sermon is a kind of introduction. I couldn't

write it without acknowledging that I am here today to potentially become the associate pastor of this church. I know we don't have a history together... yet, hopefully. But as I'm getting to know y'all, I want y'all to know something about me--like how I picked up saying "y'all" when I lived in Kentucky even though I grew up in Colorado. I can't seem to shake it. Or how I swore I would never do a first sermon at a church preaching from an epistle, yet here I am. My first sermon at a church preaching from the Second Letter to Timothy. I guess you don't always know what God has in store for you.

Our lesson from the Second Letter to Timothy is the introduction of this letter, but it's not an introduction to either the author or the recipient. Church tradition states that Paul wrote this letter to his former protégé Timothy. After all, that's what it says right up front. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus To Timothy, my beloved child..." Many modern scholars question whether the actual Paul actually wrote this letter, suggesting it was a student of Paul's after his death. In Second Timothy we do see themes that Paul dealt with in other letters but with a different focus. First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus are known as the "pastoral epistles" or "pastoral letters" because they don't speak to an entire community. Letters addressed to communities are common in the ancient world and the New Testament. Romans was written to the fledgling Christians of Rome. First and Second Corinthians were written to the fledgling Christians in Corinth. Those kinds of letters would have been read out loud at worship and circulated within the community. They may name individuals but deal mainly with the community. But the pastoral letters speak to an individual, or maybe an individual as a representative of all the church leaders.

Timothy was a companion of Paul's. Any student of Paul's would've known Timothy or at least known about Timothy. Timothy is cited as the co-author of several of Paul's letters

including one of the oldest portions of the New Testament First Thessalonians. In fact, it was Paul who set Timothy up to be the leader of the church in the city of Ephesus. If Paul wrote Second Timothy, it was as he neared the end of his life. If a student of Paul wrote Second Timothy, it would have been close after Paul's death. But whether or not this letter was penned directly by Paul meant for Timothy or written by a student of Paul's for church leaders, it is setup to give advice and guidance about ministry and living a faithful life in an unsupportive society. There's a lot of good advice not only for ministers and other church leaders but for everyone. For example, the letter tells Timothy to avoid "profane chatter" and that he should "have nothing to do with stupid and senseless controversies." Things much easier said than done, honestly. I feel like profane chatter and senseless controversies are the basis of at least 90% of sitcom episodes.

So what do you say to someone you have mentored as you prepare to leave them? Or what wisdom do you want to pass down from your own mentor who has left you? You might mention how important they are to you or remind them of how far they've come in their personal journey. You may build them up for whatever hardships are in the future, remind them of what you've faced together in the past, or inspire them to go further than you have gone. All of which the author does. They point to the fact several times that life is hard and that suffering is real, but when we suffer we do so together. The word translated here in verse 8 as "join with me in suffering" is the Greek *συγκακοπαθέω* (*sygkakopatheō*). In the translation it can be easy to focus on the word suffering instead of the full verb which means "to suffer with." We don't go through life alone, the author is pointing out. We share each other's burdens. Timothy had his grandmother and mother. Paul had Timothy. Timothy will have others, too. "Guard the good treasure," the author stresses, "with the help of the Holy Spirit."

This passage reminds me of a time with one of my mentors--Juanita-- when she shared with me something very personal from her faith journey. During ordination services there is often a charge given to the new pastor from a not-so-new pastor. It is meant to build up the new pastor, inspire them, and remind them even long after their ordination day has passed what brought them to that event. Juanita had a mentor named Pastor Janet give her charge, and Juanita kept the print out of that charge tucked inside her Bible. It was creased from years of pressing and still had little pieces of paper stuck to the edges where the perforations didn't quite come off cleanly. I don't perfectly remember everything that was on that page, but here's the gist:

Juanita, child of the Covenant, you have been called by the Holy Spirit for a special kind of journey--one of leadership, service, and devotion to a community. It won't be easy. There are times you will fail the church, and there will be times when the church will fail you. When that happens, think about your larger calling and the calling of all those in the Body of Christ. Remember when you drink water, take a shower, or fill a pot to cook pasta that we are called into the family of God through baptism. Remember when you eat bread or drink wine that Jesus Christ died and was resurrected for us. Remember when you feel the wind on your face that the Holy Spirit is constantly with you. Remember these things, take a deep breath, and continue your journey trusting in the Triune God who has been with us since the beginning and will be with us forever. Amen.

For my ordination service, I asked Juanita to give me the charge. It was a beautiful late-afternoon near the end of summer in Louisville, Kentucky. Juanita wore her formal preaching robe with the stripes on the sleeves for her doctorate and a shiny red stole with gold crosses on it. She began--"Andi, child of the Covenant, you have been called by the Holy Spirit for a special kind of journey." And I started shaking from laughter, hiding it of course because it would be

very un-pastor-like to burst out laughing in the middle of your own ordination service. It felt like I was being imparted with wisdom passed down from generation to generation. I imagine at Juanita's mentor Pastor Janet's own ordination service whoever gave Pastor Janet's charge said something similar, and if I am ever asked to give a charge at an ordination, I have my starting point.

I've been thinking about my mentors a lot as I've been praying and considering taking on an associate pastor position. I've worked as what's called a "specialized minister" my entire career, meaning I've never worked as a church pastor. I grew up in a church congregation and have been an intern, but--trust me--it's different. I know there will be times when mistakes are made, when things don't work out, and when it's hard. So, I ask you to join with me--hopefully not in suffering--but in holding to the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Together we can guard the good treasure and pass it to the next generation with the help of the Holy Spirit. In the name of our Triune God who has been with us always and will be with us forever, amen.