

"Take and Give"

2 Timothy 1:1-7

- I. *Freely we have received;*
- II. *freely we can give..*

Throughout the past two thousand years of church history every age has had to battle a heresy--some denial of the faith. In the early days of the faith the great battle was on Jesus the Christ. Some said Jesus was not a human being but only looked like one, others said that Jesus was not God incarnate. By the grace of God and in the strength given through His word the church denied both heresies and today we boldly and proudly confess Jesus true man and true God as our Lord and Savior.

In Luther's day of course the great battle was on the question of did Jesus' death and resurrection really do enough to bring believers into heaven or do believers in addition have to contribute something to their salvation. There again by God's grace through the word the Reformers stood their ground on scripture and today we know Jesus' death is enough to bring us to heaven: we are saved by faith alone.

More recently the faith has been challenged by those who say the Bible is not the word of God in part or in whole. A permanent break between liberal and conservative Christians has occurred. Today in our congregation and our synod we rejoice with the words of St. Paul who wrote to the Thessalonians: **"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."** (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This leaves us with a question: What about us today? What is our battle?

To be sure there is more than one battle raging today but I believe that one of the most important, one that can do more damage than most others is the devil's distortion of what it means to be "church" which is to say, what it means to be a Christian community gathered around God's Word and sacraments.

It is for this reason and with joy that today we celebrate a minor festival: St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor. We do so because it is a bold reminder of some of the greatest gifts God has given all of us, as well as a call to what we, as the people of God can accomplish in our families, with

our friends, and certainly and especially through our church. Timothy stands between St. Paul and the Christian community at Ephesus--Timothy had a clear mentor in Paul and was also at the same time the spiritual leader of the whole church at Ephesus.

Perhaps for as much as fifteen years St. Paul and young Timothy worked together spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Mediterranean. Once before Paul was imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. The first time he was imprisoned was recorded by Luke in the last portion of the book of Acts. Then Paul was able to be under what we would consider today "house arrest" which allowed visitors and a certain amount of freedom for the apostle. But now, during this second imprisonment Paul was held in a dungeon, in shackles, with perhaps only a hole in the roof as the only source of sunlight. There Paul sat, alone, persecuted, yet vibrant, alive, and utterly hopeful for the future. Paul was living in the comfort in his heart and mind in the knowledge that those whom he trained, prayed with and equipped would be continuing the Lord's work. Of the most special people to Paul was Timothy, the one whom Paul wrote: **"my true son in the faith"**(1 Timothy 1:2) as well as in our reading for today **"Timothy my dear son."** (v. 2). In Philippians Paul has these special words reserved for Timothy:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (Philippians 2:19-22).

Timothy was left as Paul's personal representative at Ephesus, much like Philemon was in Colosse, and another young pastor Titus was left at Crete. But it is the special relationship--mentor and mentee, father and son that Paul and Timothy shared. In our reading for today Paul notes what it was like to leave Timothy behind in Ephesus as Paul went on alone with the hope that one day they would continue to work together. Paul writes in our text for today: **"Recalling your tears, I long to see you , so that I may be filled with joy."** (v. 4)

We have good reasons to believe that Timothy was a rather shy, even somewhat unhealthy young man, who was entrusted with a tremendous amount of very important work. It was Paul who encouraged Timothy to "have a little wine" which in those days would have had medicinal properties.

Timothy is a reminder of how our faith is shared generation to generation. Paul was Timothy's mentor and in turn Timothy was the

spiritual leader at Ephesus. Each generation must first take but then also give--both are done freely and lovingly in Jesus the Lord.

In our reading for today Paul allows us a glimpse of the early life of Timothy who was reared in faith from infancy. It was from Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice that he first was established in faith. It may not have been the Christian faith because there is some reason to believe that perhaps the whole family was converted to Christianity from Paul's own missionary labors, yet Lois and Eunice had given Timothy a solid foundation and belief in God. It was that same faith that Paul was "persuaded lives in [Timothy] also." (v. 5).

Timothy's responsibilities would have been great at Ephesus. Timothy would have been responsible for combating heresy. Timothy would have coordinated worship for the community. He would have been in charge of other pastors and so in that sense he would be better understood as a bishop or less so a District President. Timothy also would have been in charge of coordinating relief for widows and those in need. His duties would have been great. One could say too great for such a frail young man. While at first glance it may seem odd that Paul chose Timothy to be the leader at Ephesus we learn that with the Word of God and Paul's encouragement this was an opportunity for growth and maturity for all who were involved. Such is what God's word active within a community brings about.

Our world is full of contradictions also. Never before has there been so much education and resources but I keep hearing that in some ways we have the least literate people graduating from schools today. We have the largest economy our nation has ever known yet we have a runaway unemployment and financial problems. And finally we have never been so connected via computers, phones, cell-phones and everything else and at the very same time so many people, especially young people are utterly alone and feel disconnected!

This is why it is so important for us today to understand Timothy; why it is so important for us to see ourselves as Christian mentors and really guardians of the churches young people. Young people need to both see and hear the good things about our faith. They need to be encouraged that our beliefs do matter and that yes we can fight the good fight of the faith and while not remain perfect this side of heaven we can resist the evil and the foolishness cast about us every day.

Today is a day to reflect on whom you can mentor in the faith. Who is looking to you for guidance? Who is looking to you for encouragement and spiritual uplifting? We all play a role. Each one of us is called to freely take all the gifts of the faith: we receive our salvation

through baptism, we receive our education through our parents, our teachers, and our pastors. (Please note the order in which I listed those). Each one of us has benefited from those who have gone on before, now, today is our day also to give. To give to a new generation all that we have received. Now more than every people need to be surrounded by mature Christians who support and guide them through the difficult times of life. The relationships that are built in Christ are solid and strong.

Luther was a great benefactor of the relationship with his mentor Johannes von Staupitz. Staupitz was the head of the Augustinian order and it was Staupitz who constantly encouraged Luther to dig into the Scriptures. Indeed it was Luther who was chosen to replace Staupitz as a teacher of the Scriptures. In 1518 Luther was separated from Staupitz and was rather traumatized by the situation. Historians note that Luther suffered depression from being separated from Staupitz. So influential was Staupitz on Luther that when he died Luther refused to speak his name publicly out of respect. It took Luther a full seven years and the death of his own father before he would publicly speak Staupitz's name.

Luther with the help, the blessing and even the guidance of others like Staupitz stood up for the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Together we can do great things. We may be encouraged by Paul who though he is in heaven can be and should be a mentor to all of us through the Bible with these words: **"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline."** (v7).

As a reminder to the great calling each of us have in the body of Christ we can benefit from what theologian Paul Althaus says: "Priesthood is the possession of all Christendom, all baptized Christians. What then has priesthood to do with the ministry in particular? Every Christian is a priest according to his ability for those whom God has committed to him: man and wife in marriage for each other, father and mother for their children, and others in the priesthood of the household, the teachers for their pupils and so on..."

Today, give thanks for the St. Pauls in your life; give thanks for allowed to be a Timothy having been raised and grounded in the Scriptures. But now ask yourself: to whom and what can you give to others? Freely we have received freely we can give. May the peace of Christ be with you all. Amen.