

PRAYER: Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord my strength and redeemer. Amen.

Throughout history fear has been one of the most formidable enemy that humanity has ever faced. Fear is the chief enemy of faithfulness. It is the great immobilizer; it has frozen many people in their tracks and kept them from accomplishing all they were created to do in God's kingdom. Fear caused the Israelites to grumble and complain as God was about to deliver them from Pharaoh's advancing army. Fear froze the armies of Israel before Goliath, it caused the disciples to wake Jesus from His sleep in the midst of a storm, it caused Peter to deny Jesus during the passion and it has been the culprit in many a Christian's failure to be and do all God has commanded them to be and do. Fear has long been the enemy of faith and continues to derail those whose heart desire is to be steadfast and faithful in their service to our Lord. It is somewhat comforting, however, to realize that great women and men throughout history, people who have accomplished great things for God, have also had to struggle with fear. Many great people who ultimately proved to be faithful, along the way were tempted to give up. Our text this morning gives us insight into how we as Christians can overcome fear, specifically the fear that keeps us from being effective servants in God's kingdom. It tells us how to be steadfast, unmovable, and faithful.

In the first seven verses of 2 Timothy, Paul reveals to us personally information about Timothy, his son in the ministry. Paul had poured his life into Timothy. He had worked hard at developing him into the person he would need to be to assume the responsibilities he would one day inherit. As Paul sits in a cold and damp prison cell, facing certain death at the behest of the Roman Emperor Nero, he is preoccupied with one thing and one thing alone: the forward movement of the gospel and the kingdom of God. We are not privy to other concerns that may have weighed upon his mind, as he writes under the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, Paul tells his young protégé Timothy, the essential things he will need to know to carry on with his work. Central to Paul's message in this book is the preservation and the advancement of the gospel. Timothy, however, by personality and nature is not one we as humans would normally deem fit for the task. Shy and retiring, timid and fearful by nature, Timothy would seem, at least from a human perspective to be an unlikely candidate to assume the mantle of the great apostle. And yet, as 1st Samuel 16 reminds us, God does not see things as humanity sees them. Whereas humanity looks at the external appearances, God looks at the heart. God sees us, not based upon what we can do, but based upon what He can do through us.

If you've ever felt inadequate for the task, if the fear of failure has ever gripped you, if you've ever felt like the passion of fire which once characterized your service to God has burned low and is in danger of going out, this is a book for you. If you've ever found yourself spiritually dry, feeling alone and useless in God's kingdom, there is a word from God for you this morning. How can we overcome our fear? We overcome fear and remain faithful by reassuring one another (vv. 3-4) The nature of this letter is intensely personal. Paul loved Timothy as a son, and writes to him as a father would write to a son. While he is painfully honest, notice that before he calls upon Timothy to rekindle the flame within him and abandon his fear, he begins with words of reassurance, words that encourage and strengthen. All of us need words of reassurance. All of us need someone who will love us enough to encourage us.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul speaks of ways to reassure one another: Gratitude - I am thankful for you (v. 3) It's always encouraging to know that someone can appreciate what God has done through you and is thankful to God for you. Paul was grateful to God for Timothy, for his ministry and for his friendship. It's always nice to know that as others remember you before the Lord that it is with a sense of gratitude, not with a sense of grief or complaint. When was the last time you thanked God for a sister or brother in Christ that He has put into your life? When was the last time you told them that you were grateful to God for them?

Faithfulness - I am praying for you (v. 3) Paul was quick to let Timothy know that he was making intercession on his behalf. One of the most encouraging things I have ever experienced as a pastor is the knowledge that there are folks out there praying for me, praying that God will protect me, will use me and will continue to guide me. Fear often brings with it doubts, not only doubts about yourself but doubts about others and doubts about God. When you know someone loves you enough to remember you in prayer, to be faithful in taking you before heaven's thrones, it is reassuring and encouraging.

Fellowship - I want to spend time with you (v. 4) It had been some time since Paul and Timothy had been able to visit with one another. And yet time and distance had in no way diminished the strength of their friendship. Facing what was a certain death, Paul now tells Timothy that it sure would be nice to see him again, to talk together about all that God had done and was doing. While Paul had been used greatly by God we must never forget that like all of us, he was merely human. Even as he

wanted to strengthen and encourage Timothy, he too needed to be reassured and strengthened; he needed the comfort his friendship with Timothy afforded him.

But then there was the element of empathy, of understanding what Timothy was going through. I know what you are going through (v. 4) Some say that Paul is referring to when they had to part ways, and Timothy wept. Others hold that the difficulties Timothy had experienced in ministry had led to tears. Anyone who has spent a substantive time in ministry understands that sometimes the going gets tough. Sometimes the stresses and strains, the disappointments and difficulties lead you to tears. Jesus wept out of compassion for those He loved and anyone who has taken up their cross and is following Him will also, at times, be driven to tears.

I remember several years ago, within a few short weeks we had lost several of our members to death. Ministering to the families, experiencing their pain, and dealing with the personal loss of those whom God had entrusted to my care was nearly more than I could bear. I remember sitting with Bro. Martin in the Jumbo's parking lot one day, and I just began to weep. He asked, "what's the matter Clair," and I said, "I'm tired of death stealing folks that I love." Paul had shed his share of tears, he understood where Timothy was; he understood what he was going through. Acts 20:36-37 tells us that as Paul left Ephesus, he and those with him wept freely. It is encouraging to realize that others understand what we are going through and can empathize with us.

*Blessing - You are a blessing to me (v. 4) Paul saw Timothy as one of the blessings God had given him. It is always encouraging to know that you've been a blessing to others. Paul wanted Timothy to know that as he counted his blessings, Timothy was among them. What does it do to you when someone lets you know that you are a blessing to them? How does it affect you when someone drops you a note and tells you that God has used you to bless their lives? This is what Paul wanted to do in Timothy's life. He wanted to encourage him, to strengthen him, to lift him up from the pit of fear and despair and to reassure him that he was still useful in God's kingdom and that Paul could see it. We overcome fear by reassuring one another.

We overcome fear and remain faithful by Remembering what Jesus has done in our lives (v.5. It is easier to be faithful to God when we remember His faithfulness to us. The old song says: "When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, when you are discouraged thinking all is lost, count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done." As a people we have a tremendous capacity to forget. We forget that we are not where we are simply because of our own efforts. We forget what others have done for us. We forget what God has done for us. And when we forget what God has done for us we are tempted to believe that God has never used us and never will use us.

Paul points Timothy back to things in his life that demonstrate God's hand on him and his ministry. First, Genuine faith. The apostle tells Timothy, "As I think about you, as God brings you to my remembrance, I am reminded of the genuine faith that is in you." In other words, Paul was saying to Timothy, "The faith I've observed in you is the real thing." Perhaps Timothy's timorous and fearful personality had led him to doubt his own salvation, perhaps he had begun to question whether or not God had really called him to service, but Paul says, "Timothy, I've seen a lot of Christians in my day, and from all of my experience, from all my observation, son you've got the real thing, yours is the genuine article." What an affirmation, what a help in overcoming his fears, to hear from someone like the apostle himself that his faith was recognizable as authentic.

But more than that, Paul points back to his upbringing. Godly family. Timothy had been blessed to grow up in a Christian home. His mother and grandmother were both believers who, according to chapter 3:15, had taught the scriptures to Timothy from an early age. Paul was reminding him that this call on his life, this evidence of faith was not some anomaly; it was part of his spiritual heritage, part of the blessing God has bestowed upon him. Those who were raised in Christian homes who began going to church at an early age, whose parents taught them, from childhood, the great truths of Scripture, the wonderful stories of the Bible have an amazing testimony. And somehow, we think that this kind of testimony is boring when compared to those who had a Damascus Road conversion. But friends, I'm here to tell you that the greatest testimony anyone could ever give is that they were blessed to have Christian parents, folks who loved Jesus and who modeled the faith in their home; a testimony that tells how they were spared from having to walk down the pathway which leads to destruction but from an early age realized that the straight and narrow way was the right way.

I thank God that I was reared in a Christian home, that I gave my heart and my life to Jesus at an early age. I thank God that I was spared a lot of the things other people had to go through before they came to Jesus. Paul wanted Timothy to remember that God had been working His plan even before Timothy was born. God was bringing that plan to fruition in Timothy's life,

and the reality of God's work through Timothy's faith and his family was something that should give him strength and enable him to overcome his fears. We overcome fear and remain faithful by rekindling the gifts God has given us (v. 6) Doubts and fears tend to cause us to let the flame of passion, the fire for action burn low in our lives. As Paul writes to young Timothy, who is probably in his early to mid-thirties by this time, he tells him that if he is going to assume the responsibilities for which God has preordained him, he must keep the fire of passion for ministry alive in his heart.

Timothy had been called by God to oversee the ministries in the church. He was called to be a Pastor and I can assure you that, as a pastor, there will always be those who want to test your calling, courage, commitment, to see how tough you really are. If the church at Ephesus was anything like most churches today, and we have no reason to believe otherwise, there were those who questioned Timothy's authority, who questioned his ability to lead and his judgement. They caused him to be fearful rather than faithful. To this Paul enjoins Timothy to revive /renew the fire of the gift that is within him, to go back to his call, to the realization that as he acted and as he led, he did so with authority from heaven itself.

Make no mistake about it, your Pastor is not perfect, but she has been given authority from heaven, for which God will hold her accountable, and she is called by God to exercise that authority as she gives leadership and direction to the 5th Avenue United Methodist Church. That is what Timothy had been called to do. That was the gift that needed fanning back into a flame, his passion for ministry. The Greek word here, translated "keep ablaze," or "kindle afresh," literally means "keep the fire alive." Allow me to suggest four things that I believe will continuously add fuel to your fire and keep it burning brightly within you.

Strong in your walk. This speaks to both your walk with God and your walk with the family of God. We tend to grow cold when our quiet times with God fall by the wayside, or when we cease to have fellowship with other Christians. Our fellowship with God keeps us connected to the source of our fire, and God has given us other Christians to fan that flame, to hold us accountable, to encourage us, to exhort us and to work alongside of us. If you want the flame for ministry, the passion for service and mission to burn hot within your spirit, you must stay strong in your walk.

Spiritual in your worship. We cannot allow what we do for God to become routine, or something we do just because we are supposed to do it. Worship should be personal and intimate. What we do for God should be the natural outflow of our relationship with Him. We should take our ministry personally. We should see it as a reflection of our love for God. When what we do for God becomes more of a ritualistic practice than a relational passion, the fire within us will grow cold and die.

Study in the word. It is nearly impossible to stay solid in your walk, to be spiritual in your worship and keep the fires alive when you absent yourself from time in the word of God. Like the prophet says in Jeremiah 20:9, "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire." If you want to keep the fire burning within you, study the word and it will ignite your soul.

Steady in your work. Keep your priorities what they need to be. The world is filled with many good things to do, but God directs us in that which is best to do. We are called to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we will stay focused on what He has called us to do, our hearts will stay where they need to stay. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit your works to the lord and your thoughts will be established."

Some of you are here this morning and you can look back and remember a time in your life when things were different, when you had a deep longing, a passionate fire within you to serve God, to accomplish something in His kingdom. And then life happened. It didn't happen all at once, but rather it was a process, over the course of years other things seemed to creep in and steal the passion from your soul. Maybe it was a bad experience you had at church or perhaps it was something that happened between you and another Christian, or maybe God did not answer your prayers as you thought, but I suspect that in most cases it was nothing really dramatic, but rather over the years the fire for ministry, the passion for service simply began to burn low. To you, this morning, God is telling you that He wants you to rekindle the flame, to fan the embers back into a flame. He has never changed His plans for you. He still wants to use you, but He will not force you to be used, you must want it, you must take the initiative, you must fan the flame yourself. Rekindle the fire and keep the flame burning and you will not give in to fear, because, as verse 7 tells us, fear is not in keeping with the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

We overcome fear and remain faithful by Relying on God's strength (v. 7) Of all the things of which we need reminding, perhaps the most important this is the fact that we are not alone, we have been given the Spirit of God, and His Spirit is not one of fear but of power, of love and of sound judgment. The strength of humanity will always leave you fearful. There is

always someone bigger, someone better, someone stronger. One of the reasons so many Christians give in to fear is because they look at things from the point of view of their own humanity. "Can I do it?" they ask themselves. "Can I afford it?" they question in their fear. And the answer is nearly always "No." If you can do it without supernatural strength, it is probably not of God. What is not of faith is not of God. God does not call us to do things that we can accomplish without Him. In fact, Jesus tells us that without Him we can do nothing. Timothy was fearful because the flame within him had burned low. The faith within him was weak and in need of exercise. Instead of giving in to fear, which is inconsistent with the very nature of the Spirit of God, we are told that we have been possessed by His Spirit, one of power, of love and of sound judgement.

Power - A force of character, which if not natural to one's character should be inspired by the fact that God has appointed you to serve Him and you go forth in His name. Love is strong in that it does what is best for others, even if that is not always the popular thing to do. In Timothy's case some of the decisions he made as a Pastor were undoubtedly unpopular, but he was to make those decisions with the best interest of God's family in mind. He was to serve God and others with a heart of love. Ministry always requires self-discipline, good judgment and sound decisions. "Timothy, this fearfulness and timidity that is holding you back and keeping you from accomplishing your God-given mission is not from God. God's Spirit within you is one of Power, that is, He will give you the confidence you need to be assertive and certain as you lead, it is a Spirit of love, that is, you will make decisions based on what God shows you is in His best for His people, not always what is popular, and it is one of sound judgment, you will need to practice discipline in your personal life by praying faithfully and studying diligently. "

Be an encourager. For some morbid reason our human nature seems to be more delighted when others fall than when they succeed. But this is not in keeping with God's Spirit. As Christians we are to support one another, to hold each other up in prayer and encouragement. Look around you. Take note of the people God has brought into your life and you will find there are those who need a word of encouragement, those who are paralyzed by fear and doubt. God has sent you to them as His emissary, to encourage and strengthen them. Be an encourager.

Be mindful of the past. Look back on where you are and where you have been. Yes, you may be in a difficult position now, but if you'd be honest, you've been in difficult times before. Has God not always been faithful to you before? And will He not continue to be faithful to you in the future. Even as Timothy was encouraged to recognize that which God had done in his life, this morning God is calling upon each of us to look to all He has done, to remember that He who has been faithful will ever be faithful. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will not leave you alone. He will accomplish in you all He has ordained.

Be active in the present. One of the best ways to overcome fear is to step forward in action. Make no mistake - young David was afraid when he went to fight Goliath. He was human and therefore it was natural for him to be afraid, but he did not let his fear immobilize him. Stepping out in faith he took action. The only way to overcome your fear is by exercising your faith, and faith without action is not really faith. You may be here this morning and God has given you clear instructions as to what He wants you to do. He has shown you what it is He wants to accomplish through you. But fear has gripped you. It has intimidated you and is keeping you from the blessings of obedience. This morning God is telling you to exercise your faith, to step out in action and as you exercise your faith, as you put that faith in action, your fear will disappear like a mist before the warmth of the sun. If you want to overcome your fear this morning you must take action. Be reliant on the Spirit. This is the spiritual realm where we walk by faith and not by sight, where we trust in God and not in ourselves, where we are not calculating our success based on what we can do, but rather by what we know God can do through us as we yield to His Spirit and trust in His strength.

If you are feeling defeated this morning, succumbing to the empty threats of fear, trust in God. The Spirit of God, given to you at the moment of salvation is not one of fear. It is not one of timidity or apprehension. You have been given the Spirit of the Living God, He is in you, He is for you and He will give you confidence, victory and triumph. He wants to do great things through you. To lead you to places you could never go on your own, to do things through you humanly impossible. God has given you His Spirit to enable you, to equip you and empower you for success in ministry. So, when the dark whispers of the enemy try to freeze your very soul, when the shadows of fear cast darkness across your appointed path, trust in God, look to Him Who is in you for greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. Trusting in your own strength will always lead to failure, exercising your faith will lead you to victory. Trust in God, rely on His Spirit and He will use you in ways you cannot even imagine. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.