

2 Timothy 1:3-14

³ I thank God, whom I serve with a clean conscience as my ancestors did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day. ⁴ When I remember your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I remember your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am convinced that it also lives in you. ⁶ For this reason I am reminding you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment. ⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Instead, join with me in suffering for the gospel while relying on the power of God. ⁹ He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰ and it has now been revealed through the appearance of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹ For this gospel I was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles, ¹² and that is why I am suffering these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know the one in whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. ¹³ Hold fast to the pattern of sound words that you heard from me, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Through the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.

Sermon for Pentecost 20, October 18, 2020, Green Garden, MI

Text: 2 Timothy 1:3-14

Theme: "Let Love for Christ Burn in Your Heart"

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

It is difficult to start a fire with wet wood. If you spend time outdoors perhaps you have tried it yourself. If you haven't tried it, perhaps you have heard one or two stories about it. You CAN start a fire with wet wood, but it takes time and patience. Likewise, I wonder if it seems to God as if he is trying to set on fire the hearts of people that are soggy with sin and unbelief. Yet the Holy Spirit ignites our hearts with the fire of faith, using the tinder of God's Word.

Faith usually does not begin as a blazing fire. But the Spirit of God lights the flame of faith in our hearts and through no power of our own, we begin believing in Jesus as our personal Savior.

The apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote his second letter to the young pastor Timothy. The apostle's own flame of faith was burning brightly because of the work of the Spirit in his heart even though he suffered for his faith. Now, near the end of his life the great apostle encouraged Timothy to Let love for Christ Burn in his

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heart. Timothy was supposed to go to Rome to visit Paul. But if he did not make it to Rome before winter Paul had several things he wanted to say to Timothy to encourage him to let his love for Christ burn in his heart. We find three of those things in the first chapter of 2 Timothy. 1. Fan God's gift into flame 2. Use your own flame to inflame others for Jesus 3. Let the Holy Spirit keep your faith burning brightly.

The gift of God that every one of us needs more than anything else is faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, without faith we have no spiritual life and we have no talents, abilities or deeds that are truly pleasing to God. That was why Paul constantly thanked God on behalf of Timothy. The young man truly believed in Jesus as his savior. That was something Paul says that God had given to Timothy through the faithful teaching of his mother and grandmother who had both taught him the truth of God's Word. They had taught him how he had failed to measure up to God's Holy will as written in his law. At the same time they had told him that God had promised and sent a Savior who had died for the sins of the world so all people can live in a never-ending happiness with the Lord.

That friends, is exactly the way God has designed his Word to be spread. Just like a wild fire spreads from treetop to treetop, sometimes jumping barriers such as roads and rivers, so God wants the fire of his love to spread from your heart to others so that more people can know the fire of God's love for them. Then their hearts in turn will be set on fire to tell still more people.

Because when the fire of God's love for you in Christ Jesus is ignited it moves you to use the spiritual gifts God has given you for his church. I remember hearing a missionary from Africa speak on one occasion. He was telling how an African man had come to faith in Jesus and soon afterward this new Christian asked the missionary if he could tell others about Jesus. I can still remember the missionary's reaction. He simply replied to the man, "By all means!" The flame of Christ's love for him was burning in this man's heart. It had spread from the missionary to him and now he wanted to use the gifts God had given him to tell others what Jesus had done for him.

And be assured that because God has given each of us at least one spiritual gift he wants us to harness those gifts to our faith and use them to the fullest. Now it is true that our sinful nature often holds us back. That is why Paul also told Timothy, **"For this reason I am reminding you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."** Since your sinful nature and mine often holds us back from using the gifts God gives us, we may not use them to the fullest. So they need to be nurtured. And God has given us the means to nurture the gifts he gives us. With his word he wants us to feed our faith, not just to strengthen it so we don't lose it, but so that we can be of service to others in the Savior's kingdom. It happens in much the same way that you slowly feed a fire with a little bit of kindling at a time until you finally have a nice warm blaze.

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But don't you find that sometimes you are fearful of using your gifts? There are many times I have seen that Christians are less than willing to use their gifts of leadership in the congregation or of sharing the message of Jesus with friends and neighbors. But Paul told Timothy pretty plainly, "**For God did not give us a timid spirit, but a spirit of power and love and sound judgment.**" Our Lord has given us the gifts to use in his kingdom and the Holy Spirit to keep the flame of his love burning brightly in our hearts, the flame of love for Christ. It is that flame of love for Christ that gives us the spirit of power to live for our Lord, to love others as Christ has loved us and to discipline ourselves to use our gifts in a conscientious way for our Lord.

Because if we don't use those gifts for God we are guilty of sinning against him. If we waste them, if we let the flame of love for Christ burn down to a few glowing embers because we have failed to be in God's Word regularly, we are guilty of sinning against our God. He has given us the gift of faith and spiritual gifts to use in his kingdom. Who are you and I to waste them and allow them to fall into disuse? Do we know better than God? Certainly not! Every one of us deserves God's punishment for wasting gifts he has given us. Give thanks to our Lord that he does not cast us into the flames of hell as we deserve.

Instead he comforts us with the Gospel, in his word and sacraments. Through this same gospel He ignites the flame of his love in our hearts. Because those flames continue to burn in each of us our Lord doesn't want us to keep the comfort of his spiritual bonfire only within ourselves. Rather, he wants us to use our own flame to INFLAME others for Jesus.

Sharing the flame of the Gospel with others was the most burning desire of the apostle Paul's life. But there were many, including many Jews and the Roman emperor who hated what Paul was doing. Because they hated the gospel, the Roman government imprisoned the Christian Church's most visible representative. Yet even captivity did not snuff out the flame of God's love in Paul's heart. He knew that his own imprisonment may have bothered the sensitive young Timothy so he encouraged him, "**So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Instead, join with me in suffering for the gospel while relying on the power of God.**" Paul did not want Timothy to be ashamed to suffer for the gospel. Preaching the gospel message had brought suffering for Paul—that was true.

But he gained comfort and conviction because God had chosen him to receive his grace before the beginning of time. God had revealed his grace to Paul through Jesus, and his suffering, death and resurrection. So Paul was willing to suffer because he knew that the suffering was temporary. But the forgiveness of sins, and life with God is forever. A little suffering now, Paul had told the Romans is not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. So it is very clear that for Paul,

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sharing the Gospel was worth the hardship and the suffering. He wanted to use the flame of faith that was in his heart to inflame others for Jesus.

Even as Paul was called to be a messenger and an apostle and a teacher of the gospel, so in a broader sense each of us is called as a Christian, to participate actively in spreading to others the flames of the Savior's love for them. That really means that no matter what you do for a living, whether you are a father or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, student in school or grandparent, the flame of Jesus' love for you is the one thing that inflames your life. That is why it is so important to use the flame of Jesus' love in your life to inflame someone else's life. What do you think the gospel is worth to the person whose loved one has died as a believer in Jesus, as their Savior from sin? You are so valued by God that he sent his son to die for you.

So be assured that your efforts to inflame others with the fire of Jesus' love is not in vain. Even though you suffer as a Christian God is guarding your faith and the faith of your loved ones until he takes you home to heaven. We know that God does not back out of promises that he makes. Paul wrote in the NT that all of God's promises are YES in Christ. We human beings often back out of promises. Not God. He went to great lengths throughout world history to see that his gospel promises were all fulfilled. Will he not also see that your faith is protected until the time that he takes you home? So be in God's Word because this is the way that God guards our faith—with his promises.

But what do we worry about? Don't we worry that we will look foolish when we tell someone about Jesus? Don't we worry about how much money we will have to take care of our family and ourselves? Why worry about those earthly things? Our greatest need is to take care that we hear the word of God regularly and frequently, so it strengthens our faith. There are many people whose lives you may still touch. God put you here to touch their lives with the whole truth of his Word.

Every fire has an effect. In greater or lesser amounts, fires give off energy in the form of light and heat. The fire of our faith reflects the light and love that God has for us sinners. That is why God put us here, to reflect his light. Often it is a temptation for us to apologize for the gospel of truth, the ground of faith on which we stand. People sometimes see Christians as unenlightened, ignorant of known facts; bigoted and narrow minded. Even if people call you those names are you not ready to suffer for the one who suffered hell for you? Are you not ready to suffer for the whole truth of God's word so that you and your children can hang on to it? Because if God left it up to us, his truth would finally be lost. History shows that time after time. For that reason Paul counted on the Holy Spirit to keep his faith burning brightly.

Far too often we Christians take our faith and the word of God for granted. But what Paul urges Timothy and us to do is to keep in touch with God's Word. Let the Holy Spirit keep your precious faith burning brightly. Fuel your faith with the sound

teaching. **“Hold fast to the pattern of sound words that you heard from me, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.** If your doctor tells you that you are sick and you need to take medicine you do it because you want to get back to good health. That is really what Paul is urging us to do. You stay spiritually healthy with sound, that is, healthy teaching—the whole truth of God’s Word. Do you want to know God’s message to us, the strength and comfort he gives us in these troubled times? Make it a priority to be in his word. The meditations devotional booklets give suggestions for daily bible readings to read through the Bible in a year. The word of God will give you a healthy, sound faith better than any medicine can do for your body.

Our Lord has entrusted us with his word. Remember the parable of the talents. Before a certain master left on a journey, he entrusted 5 talents to one servant, to another 2 talents and to another 1 talent. He wanted them to use those talents wisely until he returned. Our God has entrusted his Word to us. He wants us to guard its truth and not give up any of it until the day we leave this world. That means we need to KNOW his truth. Not simply the elementary truths. He wants us to know **why** it is important that we receive our Savior’s true body and blood in the sacrament of Holy Communion. He wants us to FIND COMFORT in the fact that he has chosen us from eternity to be his own. He wants us to believe that HE SEES the big picture in all events of history.

If we did not understand this, it would be very easy to give up on our faith in God during this pandemic. This is just another reason to keep immersing ourselves in God’s Word and promises. As mystifying and difficult as this pandemic is to understand, we need to trust that God is using it for the spread of his gospel. It is interesting that we are forced to stay close to our own communities because of this illness. What does God have in mind? Does he want us to remain close to family, friends and neighbors to light the way for the gospel in our own backyard so to speak? Friends, this is simply another reason for us to ask for the Holy Spirit to give us strength to guard the truth of God’s word. Not only so that our Savior’s love burns brightly in our own hearts, but so that we can pass God’s word of love to others for their everlasting glory in heaven.

When the early European settlers came to this continent they did their best to keep their fires burning. Fire, of course, was their source of heat for cooking and to keep their homes warm. And when a family built a new log cabin, the neighbors would bring a pot of live, hot embers so the new family could start their fire. I pray that the fire of your love for Jesus is so important to you that you will not only nurture your own faith with God’s word but that you will bring it to others as well. Count on the continuing help of the Holy Spirit to aid you in doing this. In this way the fire of love for Jesus will continue to spread as he wants it to. Amen.