

# “A Legacy of Faith”

Sunday, June 26, 2016

2 Timothy 1:1–14; 1 Peter 1:3–5 (CEB)

**What sort of legacy are we building? What will be left behind? Can we really go about building a legacy of faith?**

I’d like to meet Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother respectively of a young man named Timothy who lived in the years when Christianity was beginning to spread around the Mediterranean. We know almost nothing about the two women, only what we can infer from Paul’s reference to them in a letter he sent Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5).

We know precious little about the facts of even Timothy’s life. But we do know that Paul understood how influential these two women had been in making Timothy into a passionate and powerful disciple of Jesus. I’m sure that Lois and Eunice would be greatly pleased to see how God used their grandson and son to work alongside Paul and further his ministry of the good news. Timothy was their legacy of faith. As Lea and Griffin write:

Paul commended the spiritual heritage Timothy had received. This faith in the God of the Bible had first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Their faith was the expression of the faith of a “true” Jew (Rom 2:28–29) which found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The pair had a genuine expectant faith for the Messiah of the Old Testament. When they heard the gospel, they believed upon Jesus Christ as the Messiah for whom they had hoped. They passed their faith on to Timothy. Paul was tracing the faith of Timothy back to its roots.<sup>1</sup>

And we can bet that many others also benefitted from the faithful legacy of these two women. They must have really known how to make disciples, as was Jesus’ charge to them and to all of those who profess to be part of his family (Matthew 28:19). Do we know how? Do we even know what Jesus meant by disciple?

## **What’s a disciple?**

We toss the word “disciple” around a lot. Jesus charged his disciples with making more disciples. The stated mission of the UMC is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” But what does “disciple” really mean? To call someone a “follower” of Jesus doesn’t really get to the heart of it. Neither does the word “believer.”

“Disciple” translates the Greek word, *mathetes*, and it is all about learning. *Mathetes* might be translated “learner,” “pupil,” or “student.” Disciples sit at the feet of the teacher so that they can learn. What do they learn? They learn to be like the teacher, the master. I prefer the word “apprentice” as a synonym for “disciple.” “Apprentice” conveys the full sense of learning to become like our master, Jesus. Apprentice plumbers seek to become master plumbers by disciplining (“disciple-ing”) themselves so that they might learn the master’s trade. Similarly, disciples of Jesus are apprentices seeking to become Christ-like.

## **How do we learn . . . and why?**

How does a child learn to stay away from a hot stove? Parent’s instruction might work . . . or not. But, certainly, if the child touches the hot stove, he’ll learn quickly not to do it again. Much of what we learn, and often the most important things we learn, we learn by experience. And learning by experience is a process. The child observes the stove, touches it and assesses the result (ouch!), designs a new approach to dealing with hot stoves (stay away!), and then implements what he learned. It is a circle of learning, a nearly infinitely repeated process that makes us who we are.

In a second letter to Timothy, Paul wrote about Scripture’s unending cycle of teaching. Scripture not only teaches us (shows us the way forward), it rebukes us (points out when and where we’ve messed up), corrects us (shows us how to get back on the path), and trains us in righteousness (shows us how to do a better job of staying on the path) (2 Tim. 3:16).



<sup>1</sup> Lea, T. D., & Griffin, H. P. (1992). 1, 2 Timothy, Titus (Vol. 34, p. 185). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard helps us to see that this training is not so much about doing as it is about being. Our goal is to be evermore Christ like. In our training and our trying, our aim is not just to control our behavior, but to be transformed. My goal is to be a patient person, not just to behave patiently. We want to be joyful. We want to be faithful. We want to be kind. It is transformation we seek, not merely better performance. We can never live Sermon-on-the-Mount lives by reducing Jesus' teachings to a list of rules. The life we seek is a transformed life, a metamorphosis. As we grow in Christlikeness, we are becoming the persons God created us to be. We strive and we train, we work and we pray, as we seek to embody the "living hope" that was given to us when we were reborn in Christ.

Further, as we become a more mature disciple of Jesus we can then teach others what we have learned. That is how it is in all life endeavors – even in faith and discipleship. It isn't that we can pass on the faith that God has given us, but we can model that faith and teach others the shape of a faithful life as Lois and Eunice taught Timothy. All of this prepares us to embody the "living hope" that Peter speaks of in the opening to his letter, 1 Peter.

### ***A living hope***

Peter begins his pastoral letter by lifting up for us all, the living hope that is Jesus Christ. We have been born anew<sup>2</sup> into "a living hope" and the ground of our hope is the truth of the resurrection (v. 3). It is the proof that justifies our hope, our confidence that our trust in God is well-placed.

As the children of God we have an inheritance that can never diminish nor be taken away. God protects our inheritance, our salvation, for us, locking it away in the vaults of heaven.

Peter wants us to rejoice in this knowledge, especially when we are going through difficulties (v. 6). A young woman in one of my churches told me of a saying that she learned from a former pastor: "Christian belief is knowing that the worst thing is not the last thing." What a superb summary of the Good News. Peter, you see, reminds the believers that even though they may be suffering in the present, God is protecting for them a glorious future when God's "Last Thing" will be revealed to them for their everlasting joy.

### ***An enduring inheritance***

The inheritance of which Peter speaks is our salvation, our eternal life with God and those we love. This inheritance cannot be touched by the troubles of this world or our suffering. As David Bartlett writes:

The qualities of this heavenly inheritance, that it "can never perish, spoil or fade" (NIV), suggest what it means to say that Christians are born anew to a living hope. It is a hope that no power can destroy, tarnish, or mar. What can keep believers steadfast while they await their heavenly inheritance is faith. Faith is, in part, the confidence that believers do have a treasure laid up for them that neither moth nor rust can corrupt. The letter throughout helps its readers to find what does not perish in a perishable and perishing world.<sup>3</sup>

A question for us to consider is what sort of inheritance we will leave those who come after us. Too often we think of this inheritance in terms of money or property – things that will not endure. But we are called by Christ to do all we can to foster faithful discipleship in all those we can possibly reach.

It is easy to look at our beautiful church and conclude that FUMC is a building, but, instead, we are a fellowship formed by the Holy Spirit. It is this faithful fellowship of disciples that is enduring. It is this fellowship that is the most important inheritance any of us will leave for those who come after us.

- What effect will we have had on those we lived and worked among?
  - Our families and friends?
  - Our co-workers and neighbors?
- What will we have done to help them hear well the Good News of grace, to change hearts and minds, to show others the shape of a genuinely Spirit-filled life?
- What sort of inheritance will we have left?

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<sup>2</sup> All Christians, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, have been "born again"/ "born a second time"/"born from above." See John 3 and elsewhere. Using the words "born again" to refer only to a subset of Christians is a mistaken use of the phrase and clouds one's understanding of the New Testament.

<sup>3</sup> David, B. L. (1994–2004). *The First Letter of Peter*. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 12, p. 250). Nashville: Abingdon Press.