

Eunice: A Mother's Faith

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

May 9, 2010

Pastor Michael McCall

A Spanish proverb goes: "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy." That seems an appropriate way for a male pastor to begin a Mother's Day message. I have been blessed by many wonderful women who happen to be mothers...foremost among them are my grandmother, my mother, and my wife. I thank God for them. There is a story about the mother of Pope John XXIII. She was a simple, hard-working woman who lived in poverty all her life. Shortly after her son became Pope in the late 1950s she came to Rome to visit him. She watched as important dignitaries approached him...each would bow and kiss the papal ring. When it was her turn, she too knelt down before her son and kissed the ring. Then she held out to him her hand, the one with the wedding ring. She said, "Now son, you kiss this ring...because if it were not for this ring, you would not have that ring." I think Timothy, the young preacher and protégé of the apostle Paul, could appreciate that statement. Timothy, like most of us here, owed a lot to his mother.

2 Timothy 1:1-7 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers, did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

This is probably the last letter Paul ever wrote. Imprisoned in Rome and awaiting execution, his apostolic ministry is coming to an end and the time has come to pass the torch on to the next generation of Christian leaders. Paul's main reason for writing this letter is to put courage into Timothy for the difficult days ahead. Paul does not give Timothy any new insights or information ...instead Paul tells Timothy to remember (four times in these seven verses). Paul wants Timothy to remember the influences God has used in his life. As we go through these, reflect: Who are the persons and events God used to reach you - and to shape your character?

Remember those who have mentored you * v.2 "to Timothy, my dear son"

Timothy had a true spiritual friend and mentor in Paul. What a wonderful thing it is to have a spiritual friend who loves you, who believes in you, who prays for you, and who stays in touch with you. What a wonderful thing to have an older, seasoned mentor to give guidance and counsel. Paul was all of that to Timothy. Paul led Timothy to Christ, then nurtured and disciplined him in the faith. I think of Tom Kerr, pastor of the church where I was a seminary intern. Tom met with me weekly for several years and poured into me his love for Jesus Christ and for the Church. Up until his death, Tom checked in on me - and encouraged me. What a blessing to have someone like that in your life. It is not just a teacher-pupil relationship...it is more parent-child. Timothy was Paul's spiritual child. Paul constantly prays for him and longs to see him again. Can you imagine what those words meant to Timothy? To know your mentor cares for you and believes in you.

Remember the indwelling Spirit of God * v.6 "fan into flame the gift of God which is in you"

Timothy had "the gift of God" that is the Holy Spirit within him. When Timothy became a Christian, Paul laid his hands on him to baptize him. And when Timothy was ordained, Paul and others laid their hands on him and prayed for the Holy Spirit to empower him. Paul wants Timothy to remember the experience and rekindle the gift. We believe that everyone is called to ministry and that when we become Christian, we receive God's Spirit. Every believer has God's Spirit at work within. And no matter what we face - or what task we take on - God gives us the power we need. 2 Timothy 1:7 is a verse I memorized as a teenager and that I have clung to whenever I have felt overwhelmed or inadequate or afraid: "**God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-discipline.**" Let me encourage you with this verse also. Pray for God's Spirit to fill you anew...and understand what kind of Spirit you have inside of you.

Remember your heritage * v.5 "faith which first lived in your grandmother and your mother"

Timothy was blessed to have a Christian mother and grandmother. Remember your mother Timothy. In Acts 16:1 we learn that Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a Jewish woman who had become a Christian - and here we learn his grandmother, Lois, had also come to Christ. Paul reminds Timothy of the "sincere faith" found in these three generations of believers. In 2 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul reminds Timothy how these women helped instruct him from childhood in the knowledge of Scripture. What a powerful encouragement it is to have a heritage of faith and to be raised in a home where Jesus Christ is honored as Lord. A home where the Bible is read and prayer is part of daily life. A home where parents are active in a Christ-centered church and where Christian faith is nurtured. Some of you were raised in that kind of home, like I was. I hope you're as grateful as I am for parents who worked hard to keep the promises they made at our baptism: "to bring up your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to the end that this child will confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

One sad thing: Timothy's father isn't mentioned here. Acts 16:1 tells us that he was a Greek, but that only his wife was a believer. So perhaps he was there, but like too many fathers today he wasn't interested in his child's spiritual development. It always puzzles me that on Mother's Day we have so many people in church, but on Father's Day attendance drops off. Mothers celebrate their day by getting the whole family to church. Fathers too often celebrate by skipping worship. I wonder what kind of message that sends to our kids. A heritage of faith is a powerful, lasting source of encouragement. Some of us had that. Some of us are giving that. And some of us have the chance to start a new spiritual legacy...and to pass it on to our children and grandchildren.

Sitting around all of us are people we call church family. Many of the people around need someone in their life like Eunice or Lois or Paul or Timothy...real people to be in real relationships with...not just brothers and sisters in Christ, but cross generational connections...Cindy Thomas bringing Laura Dickman to church or Fred Ritter driving to Corvallis so David Gonnason could go on the Men's Retreat or Jenny Sabo and Lorenzo Martinez cleaning up Fern Shannahan's apartment. Being church family is what HPC is all about...and I commend you for "getting" it.

The heart of any family is the mother. Thank you, all mothers and grandmothers in our midst. May God fill you with joy, sincere faith, and His Spirit through God's Son Jesus. Amen.