

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Year C - 6/10/2019

Lamentations 1:1-6  
Psalm 79:1-9  
2 Timothy 1:1-14  
Luke 17:1-10

**In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...**

I am not sure how familiar you are with the letters to Timothy - this particular second letter of Paul to his brother in Christ does not feature prominently in the lectionary, but you probably recognised at least some of his words this morning - especially this famous line: “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

This first chapter of his second letter, written whilst Paul was imprisoned in 66 or 67CE, contains 2 main themes, 1 of which, in particular, links with the Gospel passage today.

Firstly, to those well-known words - Paul reassures Timothy, and those who will hear his words that God has not given us the spirit of fear, but rather, by the power of the spirit they are to meet and conquer difficulties and dangers; and it is the spirit of love which will carry them through opposition. And along with this, the spirit instills a sound mind, or gives quietness of mind. The Holy Spirit brings trust and confidence, not fear.

As is usual with Paul, when he mentions Christ and the redemption he brings, APaul enlarges upon them. So, Timothy is reminded that salvation is of free grace, given to us before the world began, that is, in the purpose of God from all eternity; in Christ Jesus, for all the gifts that come from God come in and through Christ Jesus alone, by the Spirit. Those who trust in the gospel, therefore, need not be ashamed. I am sure that we can all think of times when we might have been ashamed of our faith, and so we do well to remember those words of comfort from Paul.

The letter begins with an exhortation by Paul to Timothy - one whom he senses is losing heart; is struggling with the demands of ministry and proclaiming the Gospel. And so, he reminds him of the examples he has seen and the people who have supported him and brought him up in the faith - and it might be surprising to us that the example he calls upon is not that of another apostle, but rather his mother and his grandmother.

Whenever I meet with baptismal families I am reminded of this passage, and I encourage the parents and the godparents to remember what an influence and impact they will have on the child as it grows up - and we can all take heart from the example of Lois and Eunice, who proved such excellent and useful ministers.

Indeed, like Monica later, the mother of Augustine of Hippo, some of the most valuable ministers with which the church of Christ has been favoured have had cause to bless God for early religious impressions made upon their minds by the teaching and the faith of their mothers or other female relatives.

This is the sort or the quality of faith that is extolled by Jesus in the Gospel passage. At first hearing, it might appear as though Jesus is chastising the disciples for their lack of faith. "If you had even a speck of faith...", he begins, implying that they actually don't have faith, even the size of a mustard seed. What kind of way is that to respond to the disciples' earnest, even heartfelt question?

In fact, I think we might be missing the point - maybe Jesus' sharp retort was just what they needed - maybe just what we need also - to orient them to the miraculous presence of God all around them and the totally-sufficient faith they already have.

Because when we read on, Jesus uses everyday examples to demonstrate his point. And here's the thing: servants *aren't* invited to the table with the landowner; they eat when their work is done.

Nor do they deserve great thanks simply for doing their job; they just do it. That's more what faith is like, Jesus seems to say - simply the willingness to do what needs to be done.

Faith is not, in other words, some kind of scarce resource that needs to be saved, spent, added to, or anything like that. Moreover, faith isn't always heroic. Indeed, it usually isn't, but instead is simply and humbly doing what needs to be done, big or small, great or mundane, just because it needs doing.

Jesus challenges the disciples' perception about faith by pointing them to the far from illustrious or noteworthy hard work and service of a servant performing their duties. Faith is found not in the mighty acts of heaven but in the ordinary and everyday acts of doing what needs to be done, responding to the needs around us, and caring for the people who come our way.

Faith, in this context, is much less about our assent to any sort of Christological doctrines and much more about our steadfast devotion to Christ—that is, the Christian life itself.

When we look at it in this way, then, it changes our mindset - from a mindset of wanting more to a mindset of being thankful for the faith that we have, and becoming more conscious of the ways in which our lives are made up of countless acts of faith.

It's a challenge, I know. "I'm just me", you might say - "it's what I do". Yes, it is. And that's the point. All of those things - showing up for work and doing a good job. Listening when someone needs to talk. Getting the kids off to school. Sitting with someone who looks like they could use a friend. Balancing the books for your business or community group. Writing a thank you note to someone who has done a kindness. Praying for a neighbor who is having a hard time.

None of these is any big deal, and yet it is just these kinds of acts that occupy so much of our lives. “Be faithful in small things, because it is in them that your strength lies”, said Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

Here is someone remembered as a Saint in the Church - and yet in all she did, Mother Theresa simply said “I am doing what is God’s will for me.”

Today, I think we are called to lift up our everyday, ordinary things as acts of faith; as honorable, God-blessed, and important...and by lifting them up multiply them. Because when we see that our everyday and ordinary acts of faith have significance, we have renewed energy to do even more.

It is easy to question our faith when it does not feel extraordinary. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with a mountaintop experience. But the most mundane act of faith carries extraordinary potential for transforming the world into the image of its Creator. By approaching each ordinary task as an opportunity to live our faith, we discover the extraordinary depth of God’s love for us and for the seemingly ordinary (but quite extraordinary!) people around us.

And in all of this, be encouraged by Paul’s words: “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”

In the name of God. Amen.