

## Faith Seeds

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, May 9, 2009)

2 Timothy 1:1-14 <sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup>I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup>Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. <sup>6</sup>For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; <sup>7</sup>for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

<sup>8</sup>Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup>For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, <sup>12</sup>and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. <sup>13</sup>Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Luke 17:5-10 (The Message) <sup>5</sup>The apostles came up and said to the Master, “Give us more faith.”

<sup>6</sup>But the Master said, “You don’t need *more* faith. There is no ‘more’ or ‘less’ in faith. If you have a bare kernel of faith, say the size of a poppy seed, you could say to this sycamore tree, ‘Go jump in the lake,’ and it would do it.

<sup>7</sup>“Suppose one of you has a servant who comes in from plowing the field or tending the sheep. Would you take his coat, set the table, and say, ‘Sit down and eat’? <sup>8</sup>Wouldn’t you be more likely to say, ‘Prepare dinner; change your clothes and wait table for me until I’ve finished my coffee; then go to the kitchen and have your supper’? <sup>9</sup>Does the servant get special thanks for doing what’s expected of him? <sup>10</sup>It’s the same with you. When you’ve done everything expected of you, be matter-of-fact and say, ‘The work is done. What we were told to do, we did.’”

A man by the name of Heimo Raski, from Royal Oak, Michigan, served in the military during WWII, doing construction work at various bases throughout the South Pacific. One time he was supervising the building of a loading dock when a General by the name of Krueger came by and watched him and his crew at work. General Krueger was impressed with how well this team worked together, so after some time he called Raski over to talk to him. He asked him what his rank was, since he was wearing no stripes. Heimo told him that he was a Master Sergeant, but he received his promotion in the field and therefore did not have the appropriate insignia. “But,” Heimo said, “They know who’s boss.” The general chuckled, “Yes, we can see that.” The general proceeded to ask him more about himself, his background and education. Heimo told him that he had only finished eighth grade but he was going to do as good a job as he could. The general asked who his father was. Heimo told him that his father had died when he was only five. The General was even more impressed and responded, “I would like to meet your mother.” Even in the man’s world of the US military in WWII, General Krueger understood and appreciated the amazing influence of a mother.

Most of Paul’s writing was certainly inspired by the Holy Spirit, but some of his attitudes about women are a reflection of the culture of his time. And yet, he wrote about some women of faith with very sincere respect. Eunice and Lois, Timothy’s mother and his grandmother, were two women that he must have respected. He knew these women well enough and respected them enough that he even named them in this letter. And even more important, he knew that Timothy’s faith was planted in his heart by those two women.

Although Paul recognizes the faith that is within Timothy, the key to this passage is what Paul wants Timothy to do with this faith. The first thing we notice is that Paul admonishes Timothy not to be a coward or ashamed of his faith. And then he reminds Timothy that God has given three gifts to go with this faith: power,

love and self-discipline. First is the gift of power, explosive power. The Greek word Paul uses here is *dunamis*, the same word Alfred Nobel used for his invention, which we call dynamite. Can you imagine the power of the Gospel as being explosive? And love, as Paul describes in I Corinthians 13, love that serves, love that reaches out to all. And third, self-discipline, a divinely given self-discipline that is built on the foundation of obedience to God. With this power, with this love and with this self-discipline, Timothy should be able to move mountains.

And so should we – but I haven't seen many mountains moving just by faith. Well, maybe we are like those disciples in our Gospel lesson. Maybe we should turn to Jesus in prayer and plead that he would "Increase our faith." But did you hear what Jesus said to the disciples? You don't need much faith. Just a little, like the tiniest seed you can imagine, Peterson uses the poppy seed but we might remember it as a mustard seed – both are tiny, just that tiny amount of faith, and you could tell a tree to go jump in a lake, and it would obey! Now there's something you don't see too often, either. Have you ever seen trees jumping? So what is the problem? Not enough faith? Jesus didn't think that was the problem.

As you heard the Gospel lesson read, did it seem like there were two unrelated stories there? In the first story, Jesus is talking about faith the size of a poppy seed or mustard seed, and all the great things such a faith could do, and then in verse 7 he starts teaching about being a good and faithful servant, waiting on tables, doing what is expected, and not looking for praise or reward. What does that have to do with faith, with the power of faith that can make trees jump into the ocean? Or did Luke just happen to bump these two stories together, and they really don't have much to do with each other? For those who participate in our Sunday School class, one thing we have learned in our study of Luke's Gospel is that Luke writes in an orderly fashion, everything is related, everything flows, it is connected so that we might understand. And so it must be with these two stories. Faith ...and service? Are they connected? Yes, they are – our faith, as Jesus showed us, is service. It is not a set of doctrines, but it is service to the poor, to the hungry, to the oppressed, it is service to the church, to teaching the children, to proclaiming the Gospel. If our faith is nurtured through service, service given freely to the church, so that as a community we proclaim the Gospel, then great things will happen.

If I asked you today to go outside and move a stone weighing 14 tons (270 times the number of people here) from Market Street to Friendly Centre, could you do it? To add to the challenge, you cannot use any tools except your hands, arms, legs and backs. Could we do it? Impossible, you say? And yet, ants can move objects that weigh 270 times their own weight. How do they do it? They are such tiny things, and yet they can work together and accomplish great things.

OK, maybe there would be no point to moving 14 ton rocks or making trees jump into the lake. What would be some good faith goals for us as a church? I have commented that if I had said to the search committee that I wanted the church to give \$45,000 to my favorite charity, the interview might have ended rather quickly. But if you look at the plaques in the Narthex, each representing \$5,000 to Heifer International, you will realize that we have done just that.

Or if the search committee had told me that I had to bring in 45 new members within 5 years, the interview might have ended just as quickly from my end. But if you wait until after the service in two weeks and then add up members received since I arrived, you will realize that we have done just that.

Or if we had asked Rosina to bring several hundred people, with their children, onto the church grounds, maybe her interview would have ended rather quickly. But if you counted the people here on April 3, or even just looked at the pictures in the newsletter, you will realize that we have done just that.

What might our next great faith accomplishment be? We shall see, but we know that only a small amount of faith on our part, added to the mighty blessings from God, when combined, will do great things. We don't need a lot of faith. Faith the size of an ant, or even a mustard seed, can accomplish great things. If we only work together, if we all put our hand to the task, not with shame, but with the strength given by God, then the seed of faith that has been planted within us by our mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, and nourished by our worship, our study and receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion will indeed accomplish great things.

As you celebrate Mother's Day today, remember all who have been mother, and father, to you in faith. Remember the gift of faith that has been passed on to you, just as Eunice and Lois passed on the gift of faith to Timothy, and let that faith come alive in you and in your deeds, for in this way, great things will indeed happen. Let this be a way for you to honor your mother and bring glory to God. Amen.