

Sermon St Faiths Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Exodus 32:7-14 | Timothy 1:12-17 Luke 15:1-10

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Those of you who have heard me preach before will perhaps already know that I have a bit of a soft spot for Paul. My New Testament tutor at college would probably delight in hearing me say this having spent many hours listening to me ramble on with endless questions and grappling with Pauline theology.

Now you might be thinking that what we have heard from the letter to Timothy, doesn't sound like Paul, its similar but not quite like the other letters attributed to Paul. And you would be right. It is now widely recognised by biblical scholars that the pastoral epistles were in fact not written by Paul. But that they were written by someone who knew Paul. The writer knows Pauls story and knows his theology.

Whether the letter was written by Paul or by someone reflecting appreciatively on his writings, in this letter Paul charges a 1<sup>st</sup> century Timothy with a life of discipleship by sharing his personal relationship with God and giving advice. We know from the writings of Paul that his testimony was personal, on the road to Damascus he was blinded, his whole world turned upside down, up until this point Paul honestly admits he was a persecutor of Christ and the early Christians. The reason he tells this story again and again is because he knows that it is as close as anyone can get without having experienced it for themselves. He hopes that it might lead them to believe.

Perhaps you too have your own testimony, or can think of a person in your life who was like Paul. Perhaps it was that person that led you to believe. It is indeed all our responsibility as Christians to tell and retell the Gospel of Christ, and to even share our own experience, in hope that we too might lead someone to Christ. We tell our story in light of scripture and never without it. Paul draws not only on his own experience but on promises that precede him that Christ came into the world to save sinners. What Paul says means nothing without what God said first in Christ.

I wonder who the Paul's and Timothy's of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church are?

I wonder what you might say if you were sharing your story to a Timothy of today.

You might even ask where are the Timothy's of today!

It is as we know a common complaint of Christian churches and communities, that there are no young people. I often hear said that we need to get young people back in our churches. I have also heard the young people of today referred to as the church of the future. To which my answer is always NO! The young people of today are the church of today, and it is the responsibility of all Christians to be like Paul. To nurture and bring the Timothy's of today to Christ.

I don't think that the young people of today are as far away as we might think. Today more than ever young people are committed to social justice, they thrive on intellectual inquiry and are taught to question and discern, they strive to be the change they want to see in the world. They believe deeply in inclusion of all [ages, sexual orientation, genders ability and race]. Although some might have heard that Christ came into the world to save sinners, the saying is not full and worthy of acceptance to them in a post 9/11 world, where daily there are stories of war, destruction and violence in our news. They live in a pluralistic religious world where claims of religious exclusive paths to God cause strife and oppression at the very least and terrorism at the extreme. They are searching for a living relationship with God who is also the God of their neighbours. And let's be honest they are suspicious of Orthodox Christian theology and 'churchy words'.

As the Paul's of our time we need to think very seriously about how we can share with the Timothy's of our time, raw, honest sharing that does not shy away from realities of the world we are living in. Sharing a story that is as bold and as personal as Paul's, a personal testimony that is built on the gospel of Christ who came before us to save sinners, so that we too might be examples of those who believe in Christ.

This personal story appeals to the Generation Xers and mill-en-nials alike who are said to value personal experience first, emotional connection is what grabs them, then the intellectual exercise afterwards continues to feed them, both important, but notice the order. I wonder if we are ready at St Faiths to step out boldly. We have already begun building relationships in this community, but we need to be ready when we are opening our doors and buildings to step out and be the Paul's of today. As Christians we are not only called to serve but to evangelism as well. If we are not ready there would be little point in continuing to make our worship and buildings accessible, because it won't make any real long term difference.

We know that the work of grace in Paul's heart was helped by the faith and love he found in Christ and in the early Christians. People like Ananias who opened his eyes and called him 'brother', or Barnabas who stood by him. Of course we are not alone in this, God searches out the lost sheep, he calls them home through Christ.

We must participate with God, participation that is personal. We must tell and retell our testimony of the gospel of Christ, to be an example and influence to the Timothy's of today. Only then, with the help of God, we can revitalise our Christian faith and preach the Gospel afresh to every generation.

Let us pray

Father we come to you with thankful hearts because you sent us your Son Jesus Christ to save us from sin. We also give you thanks for those who have showed us Christ by their words and examples and brought us to you.

We pray that you might open our hearts and minds to the ways in which we can influence others in this community that by our example and personal testimony we too might be as bold as Paul and bring a new generation of Timothy's to you.

We ask this in the all-powerful name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.