

2. Timothy 1:(5-6)7-10- 17th after Pentecost [11.9.2016]

Live by the Lord's power

[⁵ I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. ⁶ This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you.] ⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

⁸ So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. ⁹ For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time – to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. [NLT]

The theme of the Synodical Convention we have just held was 'Liberation through Commemoration'. It was about those things of the past where we as Christians remained silent when our black sister church and its members were treated like inferior beings, and the fellowship between us was in most cases disregarded. It was about being made aware of hurts that had been perpetrated on Christian brothers and sisters - and of sometimes not even being aware of it. It was about not thinking that the past has simply been done away with by covering it over.

Why did these things happen? Why did we allow them to happen as white members of our church? Were we afraid to speak up - afraid of what might be said of us, if we objected to the way things were done?

The context may have been different, but Paul writes to Timothy here at a time where he too seems to have been afraid to speak out. Whatever the reasons for his fears may have been, we - together with Timothy - are encouraged to

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We may, as we look back on what has happened, on what we did or failed to do with regard to our black brothers and sister, feel shame. It may be this shame which has led people to avoid speaking about the past. But, as we were

shown during these days, avoiding the past does not make it go away - it simply keeps on festering beneath the surface - to burst out in very inappropriate ways.

In the verses immediately before our sermon passage, Paul does not take Timothy to task for being fearful or timid. Instead he reminds Timothy of the examples of faith he has: his mother and grandmother. In the time Paul wrote this, it was unusual to have women as role models of faith. Jewish men thanked God for the fact that they were men, because they had the role of bringing up their children in the faith.

The fact that Paul refers to 2 women as role-models in Timothy's case, shows us that we are must not simply be bound by our traditions when we look for role-models. In his book, Soul Survivor, American author Philip Yancey highlights 13 people who had an influence in him finding his faith again - one of them, Mahatma Ghandi, was not even a Christian. Your list of people who have had an influence on your faith may not be quite as long, but it is good to be aware of who they are, so that you can be reminded of their faith - and so receive the encouragement you may need for your walk of faith.

Looking to people who received the courage to stand firm in the faith. Those may be people like my father-in-law (and many of the other missionaries) who for much of his life was made to feel an outsider in the community he had grown up in, because he saw it to be his calling, together with his wife, to spend his life in service to the members of the church he was called to - the problem of course was that they were black! The names he was called - and the names his children were often called - had no place in a Christian community. Yet, he remained committed to his calling.

We may look to people outside our church, who for similar reasons were ostracised by their community, and in some cases lost their work - like Beyers Naudé (an example you may have heard me use before). In spite of the hatred of the people he had worked with, he remained firm in his commitment to carry out what he firmly believed was his calling as a minister in the church of Christ.

We may even look to people like Desmond Tutu - for long an object of scorn among the whites of our country. He has maintained a firm stance to criticise the wrongs of those in power to this day, and who has spoken out without fear or favour.

What is it that made such people stand firm - in spite of the fears they may have felt? They were not made of such heroic stuff, but they had been given what Paul speaks about here when he says, **For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity ...**

God had given Timothy a gift when he was called - he has given us a gift when we were baptised, and made us a part of his family. This gift does not include a spirit of fear and timidity - where those things characterise our lives, we have moved away from God's gift to us! When that happens we need to have the flame of our faith fanned to new life. When we look to ourselves - to the hopes and ideals we have for our lives, to the things we are afraid of losing - we have lost sight of God's gift.

The gift that we do have from God is **[a spirit] of power, love, and self-discipline.**

This power is not an ability to do great things on our own, but to do those things God helps us to do - whether great or small. God gives us the power to stand firm, even if our life of following where he leads, may seem to lead us nowhere - at least not as we might hope for. Being a missionary in a rural area hardly anybody has heard about, losing your position as pastor in a wealthy congregation, and ending up as a pastor of a township congregation in Soweto, being hounded by those in authority for the stand one takes - that is what the examples I named had to contend with. And yet they were able to do so by the power God gave them, by instilling them with his power.

At the same time he gives us a spirit of love. I can't speak for the other two I have mentioned here, but I know of my father-in-law that there were a number of cases where he actively strove to help the very people who so often spoke slightly of him. Acting in the spirit of love which God gives us, we may not always like what people do to us, but in his power we are called on to not repay them in kind.

This is so, because together with the power and love the spirit gives, he also gives us self-discipline. This self-discipline helps us work through the weaknesses we feel, the fear that threatens our life of faith. This self-discipline helps us carry on doing what our calling as Christians encourages us to do - even if we don't feel like it.

Liberation by Commemoration - we need not be afraid of remembering the past, and of dealing with the wrongs done by us or the congregation and church we belong to. God has given us his Spirit as a gift - and he will carry us through difficult situations. He will empower us to be humble, as we acknowledge wrongs, and seek forgiveness, and he will give us love and self-discipline to carry on following the path we have to go, so that the past does not continue to overshadow our present or the future.