

# Rekindle the Gift of God Within You

*2 Timothy 1:1-14*

*College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa*

*Rev. Todd B. Freeman*

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Have any of you ever really gotten into genealogy? You know, where you plot your family tree back through the generations. What is even more fascinating than making a simple list of the names of those relatives and ancestors to whom we can trace our roots, is actually learning something about the lives and personal histories of the individuals involved.

No one in my family has ever done an extremely extensive search. But I know that my dad's side of the family were mostly cattle ranchers in Colorado since the mid 1800s, and that many on my mom's side of the family raised dairy cattle in Nebraska. And the ancestral heritage of both sides of the family are primarily Scotch-Irish and English.

An interesting twist on tracing the family tree is doing it from a religious and faith perspective. My dad's side of the family were mostly American Baptists, and mom's side were Presbyterians. When my parents were married, they decided to stick with the Presbyterians, which is the denomination in which I was raised and nurtured. From what I have learned, I come from a stock of fairly faithful church-going folks. Both of my grandmothers, in particular, were people of strong faith and moral character, and both made a very important impression in my life and my journey of faith.

If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to try to learn more about your family tree, and especially from a faith perspective. From time to time it is a good thing to turn our thoughts to those individuals who have made a significant impact in our understanding of God; those who have helped raise and nurture us in the faith. **So take the opportunity to give thanks to God for those who have been a mentor to you in your journey of faith.**

It would be fascinating to go back at least 400 years or so and plot not only where each of our ancestors in this congregation are from, but also what denomination or faith they belonged to, if any. No doubt we would see a map with many places around the world represented.

I bring all this up today because it is **World Communion Sunday**, a time when Christians across the globe are celebrating our unity in Christ through the sharing of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

It's also fitting that in our Scripture passage from 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul (or, according to many modern biblical scholars a later disciple of Paul's using his name) makes reference to our connectedness to other people of faith, in particular, to our own forbearers. In verse 5 of chapter 1, we're told (whether literally or figuratively) that Paul writes to Timothy, his young colleague in the ministry, "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."

**Paul's mention of Timothy's grandmother and mother function as a chain of succession, ensuring the continuity of faith from one generation to the next. It also underscores the important role that women have always played, including in the early church, of revealing and sharing a sincere and living faith.**

Just as Timothy is an heir of the faith of his family, so are we. It is a faith that started with literally a handful of disciples, and eventually spread to cover the entire world. But this is no mere family hand-me-down. Paul's calls it a "sincere" faith, a "gift of God that is within you" and a "good treasure entrusted to you."

**What does Paul mean by a "sincere" faith? The literal meaning of the Greek word translated "sincere" is, "without hypocrisy."** A primary criticism that Jesus had of many people in his own time – especially the religious leaders – was that they were steeped in hypocrisy. I'm sure that Jesus would have the same criticism about many in our day and time.

**Hypocrisy takes many forms, such as saying one thing while doing another;** in other words, not practicing what you preach; or, as our Southern Baptist friends would describe it, talking the talk, but not walking the walk. Hypocrisy also comes in the form of **condemning others** after examining them under a microscope while ignoring or excusing our own blatant faults. Hypocrisy can also lead to **legalism – focusing on rules and regulations of religious systems and organizations while ignoring the weightier issues of love, forgiveness, mercy and justice.**

So when Paul calls Timothy's faith sincere, he means that it is authentic faith, that is, faith without hypocrisy; an inner faith dwelling deep within us and giving shape to our outer lives. It is faith that leads us to wear our religion not on our sleeves for show, but in our hearts.

Perhaps it would be a good idea, then, for each of us to **spend some time reflecting upon how sincere our own faith is, combined with the courage to see if any hypocrisy has drifted into our attitudes and actions.**

After commenting on Timothy's sincere faith, a faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, Paul continues, "For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you." The Greek word for "**rekindle**" is a wonderfully picturesque word. It consists of three elements: "again," "bring to life," and "to light a fire." Thus, the combination of meanings in this one word, which only appears this one time in the New Testament, urges Timothy to **bring a certain fire back into his life**, a fire that apparently once was blazing brightly, but evidently now has grown dim.

And while Paul could have referred to any number of gifts and talents that God has blessed each one of us with, he refers to one gift, in particular. That is, "**the gift of God that is within you.**" **That's not just some particular talent or ability, it is the very gift of God's presence that dwells within you and me. There is no greater gift, period.**

Yet, for some reason, that gift of God within Timothy was growing dimmer, whether through his own inattentiveness, or more likely, the loss of confidence brought on by the sufferings and the stresses of life itself. Paul encourages Timothy, then, to rekindle that gift, to relight the fire of sincere faith within him.

The obvious connection that all this has to you and me is the **encouragement to rekindle and relight the fire of the gift of God that dwells within each one of us.** For as Paul tells Timothy, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice [or timidity], but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. You know me well enough to know that

I'm not a "name-it-and-claim-it" kind of preacher. But maybe I am when it comes to this. Let each one of us claim the spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline that God has freely given to each one of us through God's indwelling presence. **A sincere faith can and does have a profound impact on our world. A faith based on love, forgiveness, and justice can and does have the power to transform lives – yours and mine, and others.**

The clincher is the last ten words of our Epistle reading. All of this is accomplished **"with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us!"**

So as we celebrate the Lord's Supper on this World Communion Sunday, let us, like Timothy, also guard the good treasure entrusted to us. And **let us rekindle – relight the fire – of the gift of God within us, as we claim that spirit of power and love and self-discipline.**

Amen