

“Guarding The Good Treasure”

2 Timothy 1:1-10, 14

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

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.

Recalling your tears,

I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

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.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God
that is within you through the laying on of my hands;
for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather
a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

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, 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, 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.

Guard the good treasure entrusted to you,

with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Guarding The Good Treasure

2 Timothy 1:1-10,14

October 2, 2022

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

Today is a big, BIG day at our church! We have baptized Lincoln, Jane and Audrey and welcomed them into both the body of Christ and this family of faith which is the Church on the Park. There is no greater privilege for a pastor than to baptize a child; let alone *three* on the same day!

The sacrament of Baptism, like the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is a sign and a seal of what God has *already* accomplished in Christ, but it is also a sign and a seal of what we as a congregation are *promising* to accomplish in the life of each of these children and their families. To be clear, though, this is *not* something that I, as the pastor, have done. This is something that *we*, as a church, *will be doing*, and for a very long time to come; though we will be amazed at how quickly that time will pass, and how much fun we will have as it passes.

II.

This past Monday afternoon I was walking over to the church and I saw the school bus drop off Cameron and Aubrey in front of their house. I started to chuckle when I saw Aubrey come bounding off the bus and start hopping around and flapping her arms. Just a kid being happy and having fun, just a kid being a kid, and it made me smile.

It was a sweet moment that soon found a balance with bitterness as I realized, in that same instance, that someday the bounce would be gone from her step. As time passes and as we grow older like life becomes more complicated, more convoluted and, inevitably, much more difficult. Things cease to be so cut and dried, we discover most of life is lived in the gray areas rather than the black or white, and we aren't quite so sure of all the answers which once came so readily to us.

III.

While this is certainly true, it is equally true that as we grow older life becomes simpler, though not necessarily easier, as I'm sure Anna and James and Bill and Cati, and every parent can attest; and as Kristin and Sean are now discovering. Whereas once we did all this *other* stuff, once you have a kid all you are doing is *this*; and the "this" that is raising a child stretches on for a very long time indeed.

You know what they say, however, "time flies when you are having fun." This past week I was working on the photo pages of kids on their first day of school for the October newsletter and I was struck by the truth of both parts of that statement. Every single kid in those photos has a big smile on their face (well, not so much Cameron, but he is a teenager so he's forgiven). I also realized that it seems like just yesterday that we were baptizing those kids just as we have baptized Jane, Audrey and Lincoln here this morning.

IV.

Of course, coming back to work after three weeks away toiling on Linda's She Shack wasn't all fun and games. We had a Session meeting where we talked about some pretty mundane things. There was a backlog of bills to get sent for payment. I had to train Lynne HunterBeach, our new Office Coordinator (she is a peach, please stop down and say hello). There were a slew of emails and messages to return. I sent a thank you note to James Eller for effecting a temporary fix for the leak in our steeple. I kept walking through the molasses of trying to do a final push on getting the fountain and Park project wrapped up. The furnace at the manse stopped working. I also had to have some very difficult pastoral conversations with folks going through sickness, heartache and loss. You know, regular life stuff. Just like what each of you face each and every day.

V.

Which is why it is such a privilege to have a day such as *this* day. A BIG day, as I said at the onset of the sermon. A day that reminds us of what matters most in life: that we are God's children, that we are beloved, and that of us have been entrusted with a good treasure we must be vigilant in guarding.

Essentially, that is what the Apostle Paul is saying in today's scripture reading from the first chapter of 2 Timothy. Written by Paul during his second imprisonment in Rome and shortly before his death, 2 Timothy is a tender and deeply personal final letter to a close friend and coworker. Paul encourages Timothy to continue in faithfulness and offers a bold, clear call to continue in the Gospel despite suffering. At the heart of the letter is the relationship which has grown over time and through both adversity and joy and rooted in their faith in God.

VI.

While I certainly hope this won't be the last sermon I deliver here from this pulpit, after so many years together I can tell you I feel every bit as tender and deeply about all of you as Paul felt about Timothy. I think for a great many people the whole notion of what it means to be a "church" gets complicated and bogged down with all the so-called "other stuff." The administration, the finances, the doctrine, the social tensions, the fixing of the leaky steeple and the inevitable bureaucracy inherent in any ecclesiastical body. On a day such as this one, however, when we have baptized Audrey, Jane and Lincoln, and received word of the birth of Baby Boutin, we are reminded that what we need to focus on most isn't all of *that* but, rather, on all of *this*: these kids in our midst.

VII.

In today's reading, Paul encourages Timothy to rekindle the gift of God that is within us. What I would tell you on such a BIG day as this, is that these children of our church *are* the gift of God within us. They are also the means by which that *same* gift of God is rekindled within us old(er) folks. While kids aren't the *only* means to that end, they certainly are the most direct and absolutely the most delightful.

They are also an awful lot of work, however. Not just for their parents, but for their church as well. Kids are, as my mother would often say, the hardest job you'll ever love. The most important part of that job for us as a congregation, what is absolutely critical, is to make sure that these kids know they are beloved by us, their church, just as Timothy was beloved by Paul. Through the sacrament of Baptism we demonstrate such a love; a love that God first had for us and that, now, we have for them.

VIII.

However, Baptism is merely the *first* step in a very long journey consisting of *thousands* of steps that we, as a congregation, must make with these kids. Steps which are taken slowly, over the years. At first, the ground we will travel with these kids will be smooth and flat; when they are full of bounce and bright with light. As time passes, however, the path will become rocky and steep as life for them becomes more complicated, more convoluted and, inevitably, much more difficult.

Regardless of the terrain, however, we need to just *keep walking* with them, and their parents. We must join in celebrating their triumphs and help them back up when they stumble. One thing I know about this congregation, and with *absolute* certainty is this: there is *a lot* of love in here. Let us share it with these kids, and one another, for we are each other's good treasure which we will guard with a fierce tenderness each and every day. Amen.