

DEVOTIONAL TIME

09-22-2014 @ 0900

“Keep Your Gift of Faith Alive!”

II Timothy 1:1-7

IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE

In moments like these, I sing out a song! I sing out a love song to Jesus!

In moments like these, I lift up my hands! I lift up my hands to the Lord!

Singing, “I love You, Lord!” Singing, “I love You, Lord!”

Singing, “I love You, Lord — I love You!”

II Timothy 1:1-7

“From Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s Will, sent to proclaim the Promised Life which we have in union with Christ Jesus – To Timothy, my dear son: May God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord, give you Grace, Mercy, and Peace..... I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and Your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also. For this reason, I remind you to **keep alive the Gift that God gave you** when I laid my hands on you! For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, His Spirit fills us with Power, Love, and Self-control!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you think of an activity, hobby, or sport you used to enjoy passionately, but somewhere along the way, “life happened”, and you set that interest aside?
- Have you ever felt the need to share your faith with someone who needed witness, but couldn’t quite muster up enough moxie to express to another all your Lord means to you?
- Did you ever try to “rekindle” a “lost flame”? (You know, get back into an exercise program, or relearn a musical instrument or language you had laid aside for some time?)

In this second Letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul continues his instruction of a young Christian. Paul understands how hard it can be to attain faith in the first place, and even harder to keep it vibrant. In these opening lines, he reminds Timothy how much he cares for him, (like a son,) and prays for God’s Blessings upon him. Then he commences instruction, recognizing Timothy’s sincere faith, a quality he “inherited” from his grandmother and his mother. Paul then challenges Timothy to “keep alive the gift that God gave” him. (Have you ever wondered whether or not your faith was genuine or sincere because you seemed to be “growing cold” in its practice, maybe not loving God with enough warmth, or worshiping your Lord with real devotion? Have you sat in church many times, and felt nothing “spiritual”, then left, wondering, “Where was the Spirit of God?” Was the problem with God...or with an “empty shell” of faith?) How do you keep alive the Gift that God has given you? Do you celebrate it as often as possible, (weekly, daily, hourly, sometimes moment-by-moment,) or just check it once a month or so? Once every six months or so? Or are you one of the “two-timing Christians”? (You know, “show up” at Easter and Christmas.) Paul wants Timothy to understand that if he has been feeling somewhat timid, at bit “shy of love”, maybe a little “out of control”, and “short on power” that he needs to stir up the Gift of God. Keeping the Gift of God alive is a full-time task...like any living reality, God’s Gift is alive – it takes nurturing, and tending. God, grant us vibrant faith, not a dead religiosity. Fill our hearts with dynamic love for You and one another. Enlighten our minds with prudent wisdom to apply Your Truth with honor. Enliven our spirits with joyous Peace, so our lives proclaim Your vital Presence with Power and self-control. Make our lives an “all-in” song of praise and gratitude!

DEVOTIONAL TIME

09-23-2014 @ 0900

“Are You Ashamed of Christ?”

II Timothy 1:8-10

IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE

In moments like these, I sing out a song! I sing out a love song to Jesus!

In moments like these, I lift up my hands! I lift up my hands to the Lord!

Singing, “I love You, Lord!” Singing, “I love You, Lord!”

Singing, “I love You, Lord — I love You!”

II Timothy 1:8-10

“Do not be ashamed, then, of witnessing for our Lord; neither be ashamed of me, a prisoner for Christ’s sake. Instead, take your part in suffering for the Good News, as God gives you the strength for it. He saved us, and called us to be His own People, not because of what we have done, but because of His own Purpose and Grace. He gave us this Grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but now it has been revealed to us through the coming of our Savior, Christ Jesus. He has ended the power of death, and through the Gospel, has revealed Immortal Life!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a “time of shame”, when you were “put on the spot” in front of your peers, and felt the sting of embarrassment and dismay over a “humiliating situation”?
- Have you ever been “called on the carpet” for being a relative or friend of someone who had “fallen from favor”, and suddenly found it embarrassing or shameful to stand with them?
- Were you ever mocked or “laughed to scorn” for having the bad taste to “stand for Christ” by those who despise the Faith you treasure?

Today’s passage highlights how inconvenient and unpopular it is to be a true “child of God”. As in the New Testament, today’s Church is being challenged to compromise its creeds, mitigate its morality, and pare away its purity. Popular culture and political correctness is gradually pushing Christians into corners, where they are being forced to either “make a stand” or to “cave in” on many of their beliefs. Simply put, we are all going to be told to take a stand. Will we witness courageously to Christ, or hang our heads in shame in the face of mockery? Will we gladly proclaim our love for Jesus, and stand willingly with “His People”? Will we stand by as “God’s Children” are ridiculed for their faith, and keep quiet so the spotlight never points us out? As our nation becomes more humanistic and secular, less Christian and spiritual, we will face more and more challenge to any Faith we claim. Wearing a “Christian label” and being a “Christian disciple” are two very different realities. Disciples endeavor to be Christ-like, while secular pretenders endeavor to “look religious” and still “fit in” to worldly society at the same time. Unashamed, disciples present Christ “as is,” and secular seekers offer a more “palatable” and “pleasing” Christ to a sin-sick society. However, Christ was never about compromise, has never been ashamed of us. Even in our rebellion and sin, He came to save us, and call us to be His own People. In His Love, He proudly took our sin and shame to the cross, heedless of the disgrace to which He was subjected. He suffered for us; what are we willing to endure for Him? God, grant us the Grace of Spiritual Stamina. Show us how to witness to You with willing devotion, regardless of the jabs and barbs of those who do not yet understand. Grace us with the patience needed to go “all in” for Your Son, who went “all out” for us. His Challenge is clear; His Way is straight! It’s time for us to cast aside the chains of shame and live in the Freedom He won!

DEVOTIONAL TIME

09-24-2014 @ 0900

“In Whom Do You Trust?”

II Timothy 1:11-14

IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE

In moments like these, I sing out a song! I sing out a love song to Jesus!

In moments like these, I lift up my hands! I lift up my hands to the Lord!

Singing, “I love You, Lord!” Singing, “I love You, Lord!”

Singing, “I love You, Lord — I love You!”

II Timothy 1:11-14

“God has appointed me as an apostle and teacher to proclaim the Good News, and it is for this reason that I suffer these things. But I am still full of confidence, because I know in whom I have trusted, and I am sure that He is able to keep safe until that Day what he has entrusted to me. Hold firmly to the True Words that I taught you, as the example for you to follow, and remain in the Faith and Love that are ours in union with Christ Jesus. Through the Power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, keep the Good Things that have been entrusted to you.”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you think of anyone you know who will always “have your back”, someone in whom you can trust completely, no matter what, no matter where, no matter when?
- How does that certitude comfort you? How does such loyalty and support make you willing to risk looking foolish in taking a stand for something that “matters”?
- Have you met people who suffered terrible trials in life, which sapped their hope completely, stripping them of all confidence in themselves (and everybody else)?

In this passage, Paul clearly affirms that proclaiming the Good News as apostle and teacher is the calling for which he has suffered all that has come his way. If “modern believers” no longer suffer the pains of humiliation or retribution, is the Good News proclaimed authentically? How often a little peer pressure here, or simple threat there, is enough to silence some “disciples” today! Notice how Paul stoutly maintains that he is still full of confidence, because he knows in whom he has trusted. Friend, remember that the Apostle Paul is composing this letter in prison; even so, he places full confidence in his God, utterly certain Christ is with him, and totally sure that Jesus is able to keep him and his witness safe. From his cell, Paul exhorts Timothy to “hold firmly to the True Words” that he has been taught, and to “remain in the Faith and Love that is ours in union with Christ Jesus”! What a man! What a witness! In our age, it’s easy to talk about “trusting in the Lord”, but “hedging our bets” by seeking worldly influence and security. Either God is God, able to “keep us steadfast” in the Truth by the Power of the Holy Spirit, or unworthy of our trust in Him and His Son. We must choose; will we go “all in”, as Jesus did for us, to proclaim His Gospel with our lives? Rather than “let us down”, He let unjust enemies “nail Him up”! Are we set to suffer whatever we must to “stand for Him” as He has “stood for us”? The really “good news” here is that we do not stand alone; His Love energizes our Faith through the Power of the Holy Spirit! God, grant that we *stand* in the power of Christ, to proclaim the Good News with all we’ve got, regardless of the cost! Empower us with the Grace to advocate for Jesus Christ, faithfully, lovingly, and powerfully! Holy Spirit, confirm us in confidence, so we embrace the challenge of “sacred risk”! Live in us, as Jesus promised, so we willingly “keep the Good Things that have been entrusted” to us. Let all the world come to know God’s Love with confidence!

DEVOTIONAL TIME

09-25-2014 @ 0900

“With Whom Are You Sharing Your Faith?”

II Timothy 2:1-2

IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE

In moments like these, I sing out a song! I sing out a love song to Jesus!

In moments like these, I lift up my hands! I lift up my hands to the Lord!

Singing, “I love You, Lord!” Singing, “I love You, Lord!”

Singing, “I love You, Lord — I love You!”

II Timothy 2:1-2

“As for you, my son, be strong through the Grace that is ours in union with Christ Jesus. Take the Teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also!”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever struggled to teach somebody something *important*, only to find your efforts futile, and your frustration severe, because the student wouldn't try, or apparently didn't care?
- Other than your pastor, can you think of many others who can clearly and concisely teach the fundamentals of your Faith? (How many model it with their lives?)
- Did you ever “see the lights come on” in the eyes of someone who “got a clue” when you gave your testimony, and discovered God had a Plan for them? Did you share their delight?

It's crucial to “get serious” about our walk of faith! If Faith is to grow in us, we need to keep learning all of the Teachings Christ came to share. If we have diligently studied our Faith, especially if we have claimed to be “believers” for some time now, we need to be ready to begin teaching others! Note how Paul exhorts Timothy: “Entrust all of the Teaching you have learned to those who are reliable, who will also be able to teach others also!” God has revealed a Way of Life, not just a body of knowledge. We are called to faith, not just to “sit on the Truth,” but to testify to what we know of the One who loves us, and to share what we have been given. We “take instruction” so that we become “reliable resources”, to be able to teach by both word and example the Truth God revealed. Paul tasks Timothy with a fascinating charge: “Entrust them [the Teachings you heard me proclaim] to reliable people”. Why would he insist on this? How many people who “claim the Christian label” are actually *reliable people*? Any thorough study of Church history will reveal the rarity of those who are truly reliable. Obviously, it was the same in Paul's day. Many who claimed to “believe” suddenly vanished when challenged or confronted. Many people will “put in an appearance” on Sunday mornings, or for the Christian concert, or for the pot-luck, but far fewer turn up for Bible study or a prayer meeting. That takes one who will “be strong through the Grace that is ours in union with Christ Jesus.” So be strong in that Grace; unite with Jesus in prayer, and ponder His Word deeply on a regular basis. Don't become discouraged at apparent “failure”, or upset by disappointing “results”. Keep your “spiritual radar” active to seek out “reliable people”, and invest your efforts in training them, and entrusting them with the Teaching of Jesus Christ. God, grant us a “hungry Faith” that seeks to know You more truly every day in every way. Enkindle in us a “blazing Love” that will empower us to testify to You in clear words and consistent deeds. Awaken in us a “dynamic Hope” so we open all possible channels to potential “fellow pilgrims” who could be “reliable” servants and teachers with us!

DEVOTIONAL TIME

09-26-2014 @ 0900

“Are You Truly Committed?”

II Timothy 2:3-7

IN MOMENTS LIKE THESE

In moments like these, I sing out a song! I sing out a love song to Jesus!

In moments like these, I lift up my hands! I lift up my hands to the Lord!

Singing, “I love You, Lord!” Singing, “I love You, Lord!”

Singing, “I love You, Lord — I love You!”

II Timothy 2:3-7

“Take your part in suffering, as a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus! A soldier on active duty wants to please his commanding officer, and so does not get mixed up in the affairs of civilian life. An athlete who runs in a race cannot win the prize unless he obeys the rules. The farmer who has done the hard work should have the first share of the harvest. Think about what I am saying, because the Lord will enable you to understand it all.”

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember the person who won the enlisted person of the quarter and year, or the officer who managed to get promoted below the zone? Did their level of focus amaze you?
- Have you ever “done the hard work”, and then been ignored while others who “coasted” got the first share of the accolades and applause, or rewards, perks, and “bragging rights”?
- Did you ever *revel* in a job well done? What was that “sense of accomplishment” like for you? Did it motivate you to greater “loyalty to the cause”? More “dedication to the team”?

Paul certainly “raises the bar” on dedication. Just in case one example might not be clear enough, he gives us three illustrations from common culture of his day. In his first case, he points out the “soldier on active duty” who goes “all out” to please his commanding officer. To be an “exemplary soldier”, one must be *all soldier*, 24/7/365, and abandon all connection to “civilian life”. In fact, the only way to “be the best” at any art, skill, or craft, one must “live and breathe it,” with single-minded focus and complete devotion. Like an athlete “at the top of the game”, one must know how to train, where and when, with whom, and why! That’s what makes sense of the sweat, pain, and self-sacrifice of the endeavor. No athletes can win the top prize unless they train correctly and obey all the rules. (How many of us believers would score rather poorly in an examination of our Biblical knowledge, even though we *know* all the key rules, techniques, and secrets of life are found within its pages? The Apostle is challenging us to “get real” in our “spiritual conditioning”, asking how we can expect to win our race if we will not obey all the rules, (and how can we obey what we refuse to learn? If we don’t know the rules, we are not even “running a race”, just “traipsing around the track”!) Paul uses his last example of the patient and faithful farmer to assure us that diligent application of skill and careful employment of effort will pay off in bountiful yield of an abundant harvest. In the same way, the diligent “child of God” and faithful “disciple of the Lord” will reap an eternal “Bounty” of Divine Love, Peace, and Joy! Notice how Paul concludes: “Think about what I am saying, because the Lord will enable you to understand it all.” God, grant us the Grace to think clearly on the need for dedication in our “walk of discipleship”. Teach us to seek to please You in all things, to “throw ourselves into it” totally! Guide us in a focused program of training in the Faith. Motivate us to “cultivate the gardens” of our souls until we gladly go “all-in” for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!