



**Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church**  
*Connecting faith with everyday life*

**“Family of Faith”**  
Rev. Jennie Sankey  
2 Timothy 1:1-14; Habakkuk 2:1-4  
October 6, 2019

In today’s letter to Timothy, Paul opens with greetings and thanks for Timothy’s friendship, writing of his delight in the ways that Timothy’s faith has been passed down and shaped by his family. “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.”

We don’t know exactly how Eunice and Lois shared their faith with Timothy; what stories from Hebrew scripture and the teachings of Jesus were their favorites, what exactly their worshipping life looked like, and how they lived it out in their community. But it is this faith, which is given by God and nurtured by his family that lives in Timothy.

I can recite all the books of the Bible, in order. And it’s not because I got a degree in Christian Education in college, or went to three years of seminary. It’s because I learned a song from the Wee Sings Bible Songs cassette tape as a child. In Sunday School, we listened to this song a few times, but it really wasn’t even there that I learned it. I learned the song because we listened to it in the car and at home on my boom box, over and over again, until I could sing it without the tape playing at all. Genesis, Exodus Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy...I won’t sing the whole thing with you. My parents sang it with me, it was reinforced at church, and I even received a prize in Sunday School for memorizing it, a piece of my faith life that sticks with me today.

My family of faith today looks different then it did back when I learned the books of the Bible. Besides my family and the church I grew up in, it includes other pastors, including a group of fine Presbyterian ministers I spent the last week with, who encourage me, pray for me, and share ideas and resources with me. My family of faith also includes some of my favorite theologians, like Barbara Brown Taylor who led me to understand my need for both light and darkness in my faith, Valarie Kaur who embodies revolutionary love, James Cone, who prophetically opened my eyes to black liberation theology, and Frederick Buechner who writes about difficult concepts with the clearest and simplest words. My family of faith includes those with whom I worship alongside right now at PHPC; you who teach, lead, serve and quietly care through the many ministries of this church. You who I will play and eat with at our BBQ this afternoon.

Who is in your family of faith? Who are the people that told you the stories of scripture and invited you into the family? For some of us, it may not be our parents and grandparents. Many parents and grandparents may even feel a sense of failure, as they watch their children choose not to engage in faith beyond childhood, despite their best efforts. And many believers shift from one faith tradition to another throughout their life, feeling a need to revamp the faith of their childhood for something that meets them where they are today. Pew researchers discovered through survey that 44% of all Americans have left the religious traditions in which they grew up and were nurtured by their families.

Among our new members joining today, we welcome in folks who have lived in the area for some time, worshipping in Baptist, United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church of America (different from our own Presbyterian Church (USA)). In fact, I think I can say anecdotally that most people that have joined Pleasant Hill Presbyterian in recent years aren't coming from a Presbyterian background at all. Perhaps your faith family includes the people you serve at Laundry Love with or the familiar faces you always look for in the pews on Sunday morning. Perhaps it's a neighbor who isn't Christian, or an author who has led you to new insight, or the friend you call first when you need encouragement. The family of faith is full of people who have different experiences and backgrounds than your own. Which, in my humble opinion, is key to our faith development.

Our faith is always something we inherit, a gift given by God, and passed down, sparked and shaped by our family of faith. For Timothy, it is the women in his family whom he first learns faith from. Other places in the New Testament note that Timothy is one of Paul's most loyal disciples who acts as a delegate to churches, co-sender of Paul's letters and of course, is a recipient of two letters of his own, 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul too, has been a member of Timothy's family of faith, encouraging, empowering and sending Timothy out to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. And Paul seeks to continue to serve as part of Timothy's family of faith in a time when it seems Timothy's faith is uncertain.

Paul writes to Timothy, "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."

Something has happened in Timothy's life that has made him unsure, maybe even ashamed, of the faith he has centered his life around. It needs "rekindling." We might know something about that feeling.

When a beloved member of the community dies unexpectedly. When the circumstances of life are stacked against us and we just can't dig ourselves out of the hole we're in. When the world seems so broken, we wonder how God can be good when there's so much evil around us.

The prophet Habakkuk was living deep in a crisis of faith. He records this conversation with God in the years immediately preceding the exile of God's people from Jerusalem by Babylon. His people and home are under threat, and Habakkuk wonders how long he must wait for God to do something about it. He begins by exclaiming, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" He goes on to lament the brokenness that surrounds him, the threat that is pressing forward towards him and then decides that he will wait. "I will stand at my watch post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what God will say to me, and what God will answer concerning my complaint." And God answers Habakkuk, telling him to hold on, to continue to watch and wait, and to write down his vision of hope, "to make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time...wait for it, it will surely come, it will not delay." Habakkuk does indeed write his encounter with God and vision for the future down, so that the faithful gathered then and today may hear God's word, that "the righteous live by their faith." Even when that faith simply means waiting for God to act. Jerusalem was overthrown and the people exiled to Babylon. But God's people held onto the words, "there is still a vision" as they stood at their watch post waiting.

In our letter today, Paul writes to Timothy from prison. Paul has been in prison more than once and he doesn't seem to think he'll be getting out this time. Later in this letter, Paul writes that many have turned away from Paul, ashamed that he is a known criminal. And Paul seems concerned that Timothy is struggling with that same feeling of shame.

"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."

A life of faith isn't just about feeling good all the time. Faith in God doesn't require unwavering hope, silencing our questions, or even tempering our grief. Having faith invites discomfort and tension into our lives. We need our family of faith to see us through, to remind us of where we came from, to tell us again that we are loved, and to re-orient us towards Christ when our own faith seems insufficient. And that family is stronger when it's populated by our mothers and grandmothers. And by our mentors who suffer in prison. And our friends from Church in Motion, who worship upstairs on Sunday mornings and will be joining us for communion today. And our newest members, who will be welcomed into our family of faith following the sermon. And our visitors, who aren't sure if they want to make membership official. And teenagers who are willing to read scripture in worship. And children who worship God as they color. And the man who deeply grieves the death of his life-time partner. And the refugee families that this church has helped settle into life in America and now thrive here. And the women who stopped by this church last month asking for assistance, and left praying for this church's members. And the caregiver that rejoices in the support she receives as she cares for a loved one recovering from surgery. And those who returned exhausted and full to the brim after a week serving on our international mission trip in Honduras. And the

Hondurans they met, one of whom wrote a song as a special goodbye to the team before they left.

*English translation: "We received a gift of great benefit. We have been shown that God is love and has sent his people from "the ranch of paradise." This was a Presbyterian group that has encouraged us to follow His ways and to drink together in great communion. This was a great challenge for them. As Jesus said, whenever two people gather in His name, they will share in the benefit of a great love and those that have faith will always be loved."*

Family of faith, there is nothing about our faith we need to be ashamed of-not our doubts or our grief or the world's brokenness, especially when we are surrounded by people that rekindles the faith within us. A faith filled with "a Spirit of power, and of love, and of self-discipline," a faith shaped by the "grace given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began," a faith that has been entrusted to us and that we have heard from beloved mentors that tell of the love of Jesus Christ. A faith that brings us to this table today.

Today we gather around the Lord's table with all these family members and more, those by our sides, and in our hearts. As in the book "The Greatest Table" we read during the children's sermon says,

*"The table talk is musical with every language shared; in every face the thankfulness is more than any prayer. The next time you sit down to eat, the greatest table's set, connecting you with each of us who hasn't eaten yet. So if you're hungry, join us here, pull up another chair. We'll all scoot over make more room: there's always some to spare."*

As we come to the table today, consider how we can be family to others. Christ invites us today to scoot over and make room for more, in the ways we love, the stories we share, the patterns of worship and life we embody, and the invitations we offer. Make Paul's words to Timothy your own and use them to invite another: "I am grateful to God 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."