

**SERMON: "CHURCHWIDE CONFIRMATION SERIES - WILL YOU DEVOTE YOURSELF TO THE CHURCH'S TEACHING?"**

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9  
NEW TESTAMENT 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14**

**May 26, 2024  
Trinity Sunday**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

At my first Session meeting here, word was already out about my allegiances  
People knew I was a dawg, spelled d-a-w-g. Georgia Bulldog  
Betty Zeman was on Session at that time. She was working at CFU  
in charge of their cable offerings. She leaned over to me just before the  
meeting started and said, "I can get you the SEC Network."  
Just another reminder that this was and is a good match.

How do you do TV? May be very little, may be a whole lot  
Maybe cable. Maybe YouTube TV or Roku. Some streaming services  
Amazon and Hulu and Netflix and others. You sit there and scroll through  
option after option ... and somehow you still think to yourself  
or say out loud, "I can't find anything to watch. There is nothing on."

Let's talk about choices. For the young people going through confirmation now,  
they are being asked to make a choice. Many were baptized as children  
and raised in the church and are now being asked to choose for themselves  
what they believe, who they will follow – to confirm what their parents  
affirmed when they brought their child to be baptized

Others will make that affirmation of faith for themselves and be baptized  
as an adult. Some will go through confirmation, learn about what we believe  
and decide that they are not ready to make that choice  
or they may make another choice and chose not to follow  
We don't force answers on anyone. We don't force feed faith.

Here's the thing about choices. Something especially important to us.  
Presbyterians are big on education. Our missionaries built schools first  
and then churches. We want people to love God with all their mind  
We want to make informed choices. We want to help our children  
and grandchildren make informed choices

Moving along in this series of sermons for Churchwide Confirmation,  
we come to the question, "Will you devote yourself to the Church's teaching?"  
which leads to the next question ... What are those teachings?  
Let's see if we can answer that question together

## A GIFT AND A GUIDE

In the bulletin, you'll find an index card. Using those, I ask you ...

What are three big, important things the Church should be teaching?

I want to see your answers, compile them and let you know

about any common threads and themes we find. We'll ask you to put the cards in the offering plate. You can also email me your answers

I'll try this morning, using the passage from 1 Timothy,

to offer what sure seems to me to be one of those common threads

What are we seeking to learn and teach? What are we teaching

our children and grandchildren? Let's start with what have we learned.

Our New testament lesson this morning is from a letter written by Paul

to Timothy, whom Paul, in many ways, thinks of as his own child

a young man he has raised in the faith. The letter references how

Timothy learned these teachings from his mother and grandmother.

**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.**

Making informed choices starts with an awareness of what you already have,

what you have been given. That is what Paul is doing here with Timothy.

He is encouraging Timothy to go forward by reminding him to look around

and look back at what was passed down to him by mom and grandma

Given the question, "Will you devote yourself to the Church's teaching?"

I would encourage you to think of that teaching, those teachings

in two ways - as a gift and a guide.

First the gift. It is described here as a sincere faith, a faith that first lived in

Lois and Eunice and now lives in him – a living faith. Paul then calls on

Timothy to rekindle that gift with a spirit of power and love and self-discipline

One of the reasons we look for a church is to find a place and a people

to help us teach the next generations. Before we get too far with that

good intention, doesn't it make sense for us to think of and be thankful

for what previous generations gave us?

Gratitude makes for a really good place to start anything and everything.

## GOT A GIFT, NEED A GUIDE

What have I been given? From my family, from God?

Well, it would take a tree bigger than the White House Christmas Tree to fit all the gifts I got from parents and grandparents. One of those gifts was learning to think about God's love as a gift, the greatest of gifts.

The thing about the Church's teaching is that it does not begin with what we have to learn or have to do - it begins with what God has done.

It begins with grace that isn't just amazing, it is initiating  
Think about it. Before we devoted ourselves to learning about God  
God devoted Himself to you and me, to us and them.

The church's teaching is a gift, handed down to us. It is also a guide.

The spirit not of cowardice, but of power and love and self-discipline that Paul says has been given to us ... we're going to need it!

We're going to need that guide because the way ahead,  
the way of Christ, will be difficult. It will involve sacrifice, suffering.

*Show image of Jesus on the cross*

Most scholars agree that Paul is writing these words not just from prison but that he does so anticipating his own death. Paul writes

**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, in 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, and 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 Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do.**

Paul challenges Timothy to join him in his suffering for the gospel

There is a purpose to that suffering. How Timothy deals with, how we deal with our suffering will bear witness to Jesus' own suffering for us and what that has accomplished ... abolishing death, bringing life and immortality.

The Church's teaching, whatever that is ... isn't it first and foremost teaching about Jesus – his life, death and resurrection?

The Church's teaching is our guide because Jesus is our guide

And following him leads to Easter ... through the cross  
through a Friday we dare call Good Friday, through suffering

## ASHAMED?

Jesus' strength is made known in and through his suffering, his suffering for us.  
That is a teaching that was very much at odds with most every other teaching  
That's now how this whole leader / follower thing worked for Rome  
Or, to be honest, works for us either. A leader who suffers?  
A leader who serves? A leader who sacrifices?

Paul in his letter to the Romans, says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel."  
He says it here as well. He admonishes Timothy saying ...

**But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day the deposit I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.**

Interesting choice of words – ashamed. Guess in the halls of power in Rome and elsewhere, Jesus (now dead) might seem a failure – another martyr. Paul knows that is how some will think about this humble teacher who ate with outcasts and turned over tables and died on a cross.

But Paul sees in Jesus' humility and humiliation something far different  
In 1 Corinthians he talks about the "foolishness of the cross."  
What Paul is talking about, what Jesus did, is to show us true strength  
True strength made known in and through what the world sees as weakness - suffering for others, suffering for what we believe

That's one of the questions I ask in pre-marital counseling  
I ask the couple about their values by asking them not what they are willing to fight for (my experience is that people are a bit too eager to fight over things that aren't that important), but what they are willing to suffer for.

To be willing to suffer for someone or something ...  
that is the true measure of what we value. What are you willing suffer for?

The point is this. The gospel of Jesus Christ is and always has been counter-cultural. The world may work one way ...  
flex its muscles, brag, boast, bribe and bully  
That is not how Jesus does things, not how Jesus leads  
That is not what Jesus taught, not what the Church teaches

## SUMMARY

Back to the beginning ... about making choices ... and about those cards  
I'm really looking forward to going through those cards and emails  
about the big, important things that you believe the Church should be teaching  
There are lots of things the Church could be teaching

Like the options on the TV, we live in a world full of choices, lots of choices  
So many it can be confusing, so many choices it is easy to end up  
thinking something small is really a big deal when it is not.  
Makes me think of my good friend Jim.

Jim is a really smart guy. He's an immigration lawyer whose firm  
works with employers to bring in talent and work through the system  
Our economy is dependent on a functional immigration system  
and that includes all types of work and workers

Anyway, one of Jim's real strengths in his work, in his work in the church  
and in his life in general is that as he told me with some humility  
'I can pretty quickly figure out which pole is holding up the tent.'  
I love that way of thinking about seeing and knowing  
what is most important ... what holds up the tent.

As we think about devoting ourselves to the Church's teaching  
and what it is the Church is teaching - the big, important stuff ...  
it should be quite clear, foundational you might say  
that the cross of Christ is what holds up the tent.