

“Power, Love and Self-Discipline”

**Rev. Dr. David Holyan
First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**

**Sunday, October 2, 2016
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Celebration of the Lord's Supper**

Readings from Scripture: Luke 17:5-10 and 2 Timothy 1:1-14

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.

“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table?’ Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink?’ Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

Luke 17:5-10

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. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. 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 what 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 treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, as we prepare to come to this table, having been reminded of the power of baptism, to claim each of us through the loving sacrifice of your Son, be with us as we open our hearts, our minds, our imaginations and our faith to you and to the power of your Spirit. Help us to realize the grace that is about to meet us here, the welcome that embraces us, the love that enfolds us and the fellowship that guides us forth as your body. Be with us, feed us and continue to be gracious to us, we pray, as we come before your word, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today we celebrate with Christians around the world, World Communion Sunday, a time for Christians no matter what their language, no matter their place, no matter the implements at their disposal, come together to remember that all of us are one, all of us are one in Jesus Christ. Again, no matter the language, the color, the nationality, what the bread is made of, what the cup is fashioned from, nor what fills it—none of this matters on this day when we remember and are reminded that together through Christ we are one body and one people, welcomed, nourished and sustained by our faith and the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. World Communion Sunday began as an idea in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in 1933. During the middle of World War II, the pastor and session of that congregation got together and decided that it was communion which best exemplified a spiritual holding together of all that was trying to tear the world apart. It wasn't a peace protest or a rally. It wasn't saying “no” to the war. It was simply coming to this table and remembering and reminding themselves and the world that it is Christ, and Christ's welcome, and Christ's feeding of us that holds us together.

We gather this day, not so much in the context of war in our nation, although there are bombs and weapons and guns that continue to try to destroy the fabric of our domestic and international society and security. No, we gather in a time when it seems that rather than a war of bullets or bombs, we are in a war of political rhetoric. We are in a time of heightened conversation about who we are as an American people. In two minutes I have learned that Eric Greitens is both a war hero and a scoundrel. I've learned watching television that Donald Trump is an iconoclast of all that is corrupt, and 30 seconds later I learned that he is an icon of all that is corrupt. I've learned that Hillary Clinton is the way forward and then I've learned that the way forward must be stopped at all costs. On and on it goes until—I don't know about you, but I just want to crawl into a safe space and hide. If my remote were made of rubber, it would bounce off the television at every ad that we see. It's only getting worse and worse and worse and there are Christians on every side of these divides—every side. Republican, Democrat, Green, Independent, Libertarian, you name it—there are Christians in that party.

You are sitting here, today, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Independent, Green party—you are here in this space where for one hour you get to be safe and protected and in sanctuary, worshipping a God that loves all of us no matter what, and being reminded this day that we are called to be one body and to be fed and nourished here.

Timothy was the successor of Paul. Paul laid his hands on Timothy and Timothy was to take Paul's mantle and to carry on proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul says that he laid hands upon Timothy remembering the faith that lived in his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, and in Paul and then in Timothy, there is this sense of tradition, handing off the faith from one generation to the next—like the generations that wear a single baptismal gown. We have an appreciation that faith is something that supersedes and transcends all that divides us. That it is not easy to be faithful in today's world, just as it was not easy to be faithful in the midst of World War II. Christians had to decide where do I stand in the midst of all the conflict and fighting? Where do

I stand to be part of the body of Jesus Christ in the midst of all that is working to pull us apart? The text says that Paul is reminding Timothy to rekindle what God has given him and what lives inside of him. That it is not a spirit of cowardice that resides within us but it is a spirit of power and love and self-discipline. Twice he says not to be ashamed.

What I have come to realize about this experience of being welcomed to the table and being fed by Christ and then being sent out into the world is that it does not protect us from fear or shame or embarrassment or worry. What it does is it empowers us to move through those experiences to that which is good and that which is sure and that which is solid which is our faith in Jesus Christ. There are times when I want my faith to be a bunker where I can hide and ignore what's happening in the world. There are times when I want my faith to automatically shut off the messages that I find offensive or hurtful or unjust. But that is not what our faith does. Our faith reminds us of a deeper reality—that each of us, as we come forward to take bread and to dip that bread into the cup, is welcomed, that each of us is forgiven, that each of us is loved and that each of us is part of a larger family, a communion of the faithful. I don't know about you, but I need this reminder. I need to be reminded what it's like to come to this table in the midst of all that tries to tear the world apart. So I offer this blessing for World Communion Sunday that was written by Jan Richardson.

And the table will be wide
 And the welcome will be wide
And the arms will open wide and gather us in
 And our hearts will open wide and receive.
And we will come as children who trust there is enough.
 And we will come unhindered and free.
And our aching will be met with bread
 And our sorrow will be met with wine.
And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.
 And we will turn toward each other without fear.
And we will give up our appetite for despair
 And we will taste and know of delight.
And we will become bread for a hungry world.
 And we will become drink for those who thirst
And the blessed will become the blessing
 And everywhere will be the feast.

May it be so. Amen