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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

2 Timothy 1:3-9; 3:10-16

11 September 2022

The Promise of the Young

Opening Greeting/Prayer and Sharing Time

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. Good morning also to all of you who join us online right now or maybe at a later time when you watch the recording. Welcome to any and all guests with us this morning. May your hearts, minds, and bodies be inspired and encouraged by our time together this morning.

Please join me in prayer: God of our past, present, and future, may we trust in your power and will to renew and transform all things even as we offer our future, seen and heard in the young ones among us who will carry on your way, the way of our Savior Jesus well beyond our time here with them. We thank you for the ways that you challenge us to consider the children among us and the wisdom and resilience that they offer us in each day. In Jesus name. Amen.

Message:

Summer of Stories 2022. In these last 10 weeks, we have explored stories that come from all parts of the scriptures. From the Genesis narratives of the patriarchs to now the early Christian community after Jesus's ascension, we have attempted to get in the shoes of children who have been integral parts of the unfolding situations around them. Some have made all of the difference in where the story ends up, while others have been important contrasts or FOIL's to the adults of the story. We have encountered difficult questions about suffering and obedience, truthfulness

and commitment, hope and despair, life and death, generosity and faith, as well as many other themes that make up the stuff of real life. These are the questions that we find ourselves considering in our own daily experiences as we grow in relationship with God and each other.

You probably noticed that I did not offer a character's name as part of my message title for this morning, though it might have been easy enough to figure out based on the scriptures that I selected. I wanted to be sure to stick to the central focus of today's events, which is Sunday School kick-off. We invest our time, teaching, energy, life, and hope into those who are coming after us, our children, the young ones among us who embody the promise of the future of our church, our community, our world. We have Sunday School because we want to share the faith that we have inherited from those before us with those who are coming after. The promise and hope of the young among us is what drives us each Sunday to offer teaching and stories from scripture that will center our children in the faith that we proclaim in our worship service.

This important piece of community life, of passing faith onto the generations coming after us, is exactly what our scripture is about this morning. Paul is writing this letter to one of his younger companions, Timothy, who is leading and teaching in the church in Ephesus. We do not hear or know how Timothy became a follower of the way, as it was called in the early years of the church, but he has found a place under Paul's teaching and leadership that has prepared him for this moment. By this time, Timothy is not a child anymore but very well might be a younger person in the Ephesian church struggling with not only how to embrace the authority that Paul has handed on to him as a founder of that community but also how to foster the respect and trust of the members of the church. Paul is in Rome, under Roman imperial guard, awaiting trial or a legal hearing of some kind, and Paul seems ultimately aware that he is probably not going to make it out of this one. If you read the book of Acts early in the New Testament, you

might be amazed by how many times Paul makes it out of difficult, even life-threatening situations, but at this moment, Paul seems to have resigned himself to a looming end, which is what leads him to writing this letter to his beloved student and friend.

When I was growing up, I spent most of my time learning the bible and attempting to make plain sense of how it all fit together in the particular system of beliefs that had been handed on to me by my parents. When I memorized verses in the AWANA program of my childhood years, I learned them as isolated collections of words that fit neatly into the ways that God had been presented to me. I do not remember learning much context, especially the story or larger picture or situation that surrounded each of these verses or books. Along with some developmental maturity inspired by the continued growth of my prefrontal cortex, a few significant experiences in my adolescent and young adult years opened my eyes to the stories that surround and impact the phrases and words of scripture.

One of these experiences was a summer week-long mission trip that my high school youth group was taking to Colorado before my senior year of high school. If students were interested in going, they had to write a letter back to Paul in response to his second letter to Timothy, which I had never considered. I had always thought of Paul's letters as theological treatises, more for study and learning, more for right belief in God than for personal connection or consideration. I have to admit that it was challenging then because I had to learn to read the scriptures in a different way than I had previously. I remember reading the letter, it seemed like hundreds of times, before I finally felt like I could begin writing, and even then, it felt somewhat disingenuous. What could I write that the apostle Paul would really want to consider? But ever since then, I have always been reminded that these books of the New Testament were originally letters, written to particular people and communities at particular times.

So let's look at these pieces of 2 Timothy and consider the ways that Timothy might have heard them. First in chapter 1, Paul reminds Timothy that the faith that he has is not only a gift from God but an inheritance that he has received from his mother and grandmother, which is a powerful reminder to all of us as well as to our children. We are not travelling this road alone, nor are we the first to encounter whatever bumps or roadblocks arise. We have people who have come before us and learned from the ones before them, who inherited a particular faith tradition and practices that have sustained them and will continue to sustain us as we go. This moment in 2 Timothy is a reminder to all of us that we can ask questions, listen closely, and learn from those around us who are walking in the way of Jesus in this church community and beyond.

Paul continues in verses 6-7 of chapter 1 to remind Timothy that he has been gifted for this time, for this call on his life, that he has nothing to be ashamed of as a follower of Jesus or as a friend of Paul, a prisoner. For those who will mock and persecute Timothy because he follows a crucified leader who could not even withstand the judgment of Rome or his own people, Paul tells him that he will suffer just as Paul and many others have. Some do not understand and will not understand the upside-down nature of the way of Jesus or the kingdom that Jesus began in his ministry and death, and God vindicated and solidified in Jesus's resurrection. All of the values of our world have been overturned, have been shown to be fruitless in light of the grace and calling that has been offered us in Jesus. This moment is a reminder to us that even then in the first century and now in the twenty-first century, some will mock us for thinking, believing, or envisioning a world different than the one that is right in front of us. But that is the message of the gospel, that there is hope and life and truth and renewed relationship and peace and strength for those who choose to follow in Jesus's example and way.

This is a moment of warning too for children as well as adults. Paul offers this warning as an invitation to Timothy. Join me in suffering, Paul says, and I think Paul extends that same invitation to us. Join me in re-creating the world in the way that God has always envisioned, in the way that Jesus has shown us in his life, death, and resurrection, but realize that some won't be happy about it. They will fight you tooth and nail about it, even to the point of hurting you as the world hurt Jesus so severely, sometimes even in God's name.

When we enter chapter 3, we see Paul revisiting this same theme with Timothy as he did in chapter 1. Paul reminds Timothy of what will sustain him in the work and probably suffering ahead, in Ephesus and beyond, even after Paul is gone. Those two things that Paul reminds him of are the examples and teaching of those who have gone before him along with the scriptures. When you are wondering the best way forward with the situation in front of you, look to the bible and look to those whom you have learned from. You have the collective wisdom of the generations before you alongside the stories and teachings of the scriptures, some of which you will be exploring and learning throughout this coming Sunday School year. May we all continue to learn from the faith that we have inherited, the scriptures that have inspired that heritage, and the word, Jesus the Messiah, who has shown us the way so that we might be proficient, equipped and ready for every good work that lays ahead of us on life's journey.

Closing prayer:

Let us pray: ancient and present God, we look to you and those who have gone before us as we discern our path forward. We pray for this Sunday School year for all of the children and adults who will find hope and new life in the scriptures and stories of our faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.