

Rev. Janet R. Doyle  
World Communion Sunday  
Sunday, October 2, 2022  
Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

## **Sermon: Fan Into Flames**

Becoming a mother or father is an amazingly joyful experience but also a daunting task of responsibility for the rest of your life. I remember when we brought Sarah home from the hospital my husband drove very slowly and carefully through the streets to our home. Then that first day at home, I thought, we are responsible for feeding Sarah and we are responsible for her physical health and her spiritual health, teaching her about Jesus, her Savior and Lord. Being a parent can be overwhelming but life changing for your children's future.

The Apostle Paul knew this feeling as well, even though we have no evidence that he fathered any children of his own. Paul's concern was for the spiritual safety and wellbeing of those who had come to faith in Jesus Christ through his own ministry and for the young churches he helped form. These churches were his children. He was always concerned about the possibility they might be led astray by false teaching or become discouraged when their faith was tested. He was concerned over their ability to withstand persecution, and so to encourage these churches and their leaders, Paul wrote letters to them and thought of them like his children who were still young in their faith and commitment to the Lord.

In 2 Timothy he is writing to Timothy, a young believer in the faith whom he thinks of like a son. As Paul wrote this letter, he was imprisoned again in Rome, and he expected to be executed. Therefore, this promise of life was especially precious to him.

The Bible doesn't tell us the details, but it seems that, after Paul was released from the Roman prison mentioned at the end of the book of Acts, he enjoyed a few more years of liberty until he was re-arrested and imprisoned in Rome again. This letter was written from Paul's second Roman imprisonment, and soon after he wrote this letter, he was condemned and executed in Rome at the command of Nero.

Paul sensed this and therefore 2 Timothy is not only the last letter we have from Paul, there is also a note of urgency and passion we might expect from a man who knew he would soon be executed. If you were in Paul's place, what parting words of advice would you write to your children and grandchildren or family members?

Timothy was on Paul's mind. "Without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day." Paul was in constant prayer day and night for this young believer. Paul was filled with joy remembering the genuine faith that Timothy had which we learn began first with his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. Timothy had a godly upbringing due to the influence of his grandmother and mother. Paul met Timothy on his second missionary journey when he went to Lystra. You can read about it in Acts 16:1-5.

Do you remember a grandparent or parent sharing their faith story with you when you were young? It is important for children to hear about your faith in Jesus Christ and understand the love God has for them when they are very young. Our daughter Sarah used to sing "Jesus Loves Me" in the shopping cart as I shopped in the food store. Our children learned about the love Jesus has for them at a very young age.

Many children these days don't know that Jesus loves them, and they don't hear the faith stories of their parents or grandparents. Many parents and grandparents these days don't have faith in God so they can't tell their children about Jesus, their Savior, who died to give them eternal life. Parents are very eager to get their children out on the field to learn soccer or a sport, but they don't bring them to church to learn about the love of Jesus. It is sad what is happening to our children.

Parents or grandparents are the first and best teachers of faith in children's lives. It is in the home that children first learn how to say prayers at meals and bedtime. Children learn what their parents believe about God when they ask the hard questions of life. This is how we pass our faith from generation to generation.

Our children, once of age, must be accountable before God and must have their own relationship with Jesus Christ to have eternal life.

Paul encouraged Timothy to be strong and bold in his faith. Paul goes on to say, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Timothy is to fan into flame the gift of faith that fueled his ministry. What happens when you fan a campfire? The flames get bigger and higher and the wood catches on fire and it burns brighter and stronger. A fire left to itself will always burn out but encourage the fire and it will burn brightly. Paul is reminding Timothy and it reminds us to fan the flame within our own lives; to keep growing and using the gifts that God has given us. It is the flame of the Holy Spirit. It needs to grow as we serve the Lord. We all have flames of the Holy Spirit in our lives, gifts that God has given us to grow and be used to encourage the church and the people of God. Just like Timothy, the Holy Spirit wants us to fan into flames the spiritual gift we have been given and to use it for building up the Kingdom of God. When we use our gifts for God we will burn brightly.

Paul also encourages Timothy and us to not be ashamed of the testimony of the gospel. Today we live in a world where it is difficult to be a Christian and to stand up for Jesus. Many around the world are persecuted for their faith. It is easy to be a Christian at church but difficult in the world around our friends, relatives or co-workers. Most of the time, we’re ashamed about the wrong things we do, but we should not be ashamed of doing the things of God.

How can we keep the flame burning? It is by feeding the flame by reading the Bible, prayer and being in a community of faith and studying the Word of God with others. We need to help each other fan the flames so they keep burning brightly. As Christians we need to keep fanning the flame so it does not go out.

Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

God will help us as we serve in his name. When we rejoice in hope and be patient in tribulation we will continue to fan into a flame in

our own lives and in the life of our church. Let us pray for a breeze of the Holy Spirit to fan the flames into a roaring fire in our lives and in the life of our church and all the churches around the world this World Communion Sunday.

Timothy had been saved with a holy calling for God's purpose, and Paul reminds him that he was secure in Jesus, the one he had placed his life and trust into. Paul calls Timothy to know and keep the truth on fire for all to see because the truth changed his life forever.

We are all to take our responsibility seriously, like Timothy did. As believers, we have the responsibility to share this Truth of the Gospel Message with those we meet. Paul's final words to Timothy are his final words to us, and we should take to heart what he is saying. It isn't easy being a Christian, but we have a responsibility to keep the flame burning brightly for the future generations.

There is a story in John Ortberg's book **The Me I Want to Be** (p. 249-254) that tells of a missionary couple who served in India. They used their gifts for the Lord under severe circumstances and kept fanning the flame to keep the Gospel Message burning brightly in a land of darkness.

Evelyn and Jessie Brand went to India in 1909 and began a ministry to people in rural India, bringing education and medical supplies, and building roads to reduce the isolation of the poor. Early in their ministry they went seven years without a single convert, but then a priest of a local tribal religion developed a fever and grew deathly ill. Nobody else would go near him, but Evelyn and Jessie nursed him as he was dying. He said, "This God, Jesus, must be the true God because only Jessie and Evelyn will care for me in my dying."

The priest gave his children to them to care for after he died and that became a spiritual turning point in that part of the world. People began to examine the life and teachings of Jesus, and in increasing numbers began to follow him. Evelyn and Jessie had thirteen years of productive service, then Jessie died. By this time, Evelyn was fifty years old, and everyone expected her to return to her home in England. But she would not do it.

She was known and loved for miles around as “Granny Brand,” and she stayed another twenty years under the mission board she had served so faithfully.

Granny Brand had spent her life in India fanning the flame constantly. She had twenty years of being a widow, and at seventy she received word from her home mission office in England that they were not going to give her another five-year term. They felt that she was simply getting too old. But she was also stubborn. Evelyn didn’t go back to England. She had a little shack built and bought a pony to get around the mountains. She would ride from village to village on horseback to tell people about Jesus. She did that for five years on her own. One day at seventy-five years old, she fell off and broke her hip. Paul Brand, her son, who was a doctor, said to her, “Mom, you had a great run. God’s used you. It’s time to turn it over now. You go back home.”

Granny Brand spent another eighteen years traveling from one village to another on horseback. Nothing could stop her. She kept fanning the flame of the Holy Spirit in her life and fanning the flame in the lives of others.

Finally, when she was ninety-three years old, she could not ride horseback anymore. So, the men in these villages put her on a stretcher and carried her from one village to another, because they loved her. She lived two more years. She died, but she never retired. She just graduated.”

God is at work in your life, God is at work in our church, and God is at work around the world. Let us keep fanning into flames so others will know the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, as you come to the Lord’s Table, know that God is calling to you and wants you to keep your flame burning brightly for all to see the love, forgiveness, and mighty works of God in your life.

Share the love of God with boldness and “through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.” (v 14).