



Sermon Series: “Can 2 Timothy Edify Us?”
“If”

Preaching Text: 2 Timothy 2:8-15
13 October 2013: 21st Sunday after Pentecost
FUMC of Arlington, Texas 76011

The “Pastoral Letters” or “Epistles” refer to Paul’s Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus. In these epistles Paul addresses issues pertaining to the life and ministry of the church in probably the latest stage of his writing. He instructs his youngish co-worker Timothy to furnish the churches with qualified pastors and lay leaders and offers qualifications. Paul writes about the worship life of the church and how to care for believer’s souls. Paul also urges those he trains, Timothy and others, to guard against false doctrine. Paul wants them to teach the gospel dependably and to demonstrate a godly life.

May we hear the day’s lesson, 2 Timothy 2:8-15?

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 11 The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself. 14 Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:8-15).

In the olden days, that is pre-WW II, we habitually considered learning in the mode of elders teaching youngers. The church and society at large has operated this way for several millennia. Young Greeks, for example, flocked to the seventy year old Socrates because he had a lot of spunk. I remember Fred Craddock, relating a story about Dr. N. Scott Momaday, a professor of literature at the University of California. Momaday is also a member of a Kiowa Native American tribe. [I heard the brilliant Momaday speak in Santa Fe in 1996.]

When Momaday was just a boy, his father took him to a woman of the tribal



village early in the morning, left him all day, and picked him up at suppertime. He said that all day long the old woman told stories. They sang old songs, and she described rituals, telling the oral history of the Kiowa people. She told how they began out of a hollow log in the Yellowstone River; of the tribe's migration southward; of the wars with the other tribes; of the coming of the white man; of the buffalo hunts—the slaughter; of the coming of the War; of moving southward again to Kansas; of starvation and disease; and finally, of the arrival at Fort Sill and the reservation and confinement. Then about dark, he said, my father picked me up. Momaday said, “That morning I started the day as just another kid, but when I left her house I was a Kiowa” (Cited by Eric S. Ritz, Thanks for the Memories, but taken from the tape Preaching Today 22).

Craddock concludes “When youngsters leave our church building, do they leave Christian? To be Christian is to be enrolled in a story, and anybody who can't remember any farther back than his or her birth is an orphan.” An orphan is anyone who doesn't have a story. It is good to remember we learn a lot from those who have years of experience and the wisdom of time on their side.

But one thing that some of us have learned quite painfully is that our youngest also have much to teach us. Sometimes I forget that in my younger days I had a certain optimistic idealism that burned in my bones. As we mature, sometimes we get so used to compromise and settling for concessions in our daily life that we are in danger of losing our way. Negotiation and compromise are frequently necessary in a life where everyone has the vital opinion. If you need an example, then look no farther than Washington DC this week. But to forget the love we had at first, as Revelation 2:4 reminds us, is a sin against ourselves. Authentically wise people can learn from anyone. We can learn a lot from our youngsters—and I daresay that they can learn a thing or two from older folks as well.

In our lesson today we have a classic instance of how the Bible helps people who lived commonly in a non-literate world learn and remember important material. A



thorough examination of literacy in Palestine is by a professor of Jewish studies at the University of London, Catherine Hezser, who shows that in the days of Jesus probably only 3 percent of Jews in Palestine were literate. Not only that but few people would have had access to the scarce books (or more likely parchments or scrolls). Books in the west only become more or less common in the 12th century.

But Paul helps people learn and remember by the way he writes his letters. A familiar example is Philippians 2:5-11—it is often called the Christ hymn. Paul just picks this hymn up and inserts it in the letter he is writing.

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Early Christian writers so deftly wove hymns into scripture’s context as to make them virtually blend in. Although we do not know exactly which texts Christians sung as hymns, in the forms of these ‘hymns’ we can differentiate from other “regular” scripture. An example is from Luke’s Magnificat:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever (Luke 1:46-7).



There are many other examples (see: Luke 1: 68 “Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel” 2: 29-32 (“Nuc Dimittis Servum Tuum, etc.”). In other words we remember and appropriate scripture in worship. If someone asked you to explain the Christian faith you could do worse than remember the general outlines of how we celebrate communion—aided by the words from the liturgy. Or be able to recite the Lord’s Prayer or sing the *Doxology* or the *Gloria Patri* or even say the prayer that begins “Now I lay me down to sleep” There are many ways to remember and the Greeks taught us the use of mnemonic devices. So next time you are looking up something alphabetically and you cannot remember whether “p” comes before or after “o”—just sing you little ABCs song. Know also that Paul may have had a catchy little tune when he wanted people to remember this promise to Timothy which is in the form of a song or hymn:

The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he will also deny us;

13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful

— for he cannot deny himself.