

"TIMOTHY'S STORY"

INTRODUCTION Today's sermon is the third in a series of four sermons, all of which have been built around New Testament personalities. This morning we're thinking about a young man whose name was Timothy.

If Jesus had his beloved disciple in John, so Paul had his beloved disciple in Timothy. The friendship between these two men takes its place in any listing of the great friendships of history: David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Luther and Melanchthon, Tennyson and Hallam.

BACKGROUND Now Timothy was probably still a teen-ager when Paul came to Lystra in the course of his first missionary journey. The boy was the son of a mixed marriage - his mother a Jew, his father a Greek. We have no details about his conversion experience. The only hint that we have is in Paul's comment that the mother, Eunice, and the grandmother, Lois, were converted first. I wonder if an enthusiastic mother persuaded a reluctant son to go with a group of his friends to the edge of the crowd where Paul and Barnabas were the center with their powerful preaching about Jesus Christ. We do not know just how it happened; we only know that it did happen and that the influence of a mother and a grandmother were in all probability involved. Timothy became a Christian. Theodore Parker Ferris once described a Christian in this way,

"A Christian is a person who is drawn to Jesus Christ, and being drawn to Him, believes in Him, and believing begins to behave like Him".

That was Timothy.

There must have been those hours during Paul's first stay in Lystra when the Apostle and the apprentice talked together on the deeper levels. One wonders... did Timothy's Greek father give him a difficult time at home in arguments about this new faith young Timothy was embracing? One wonders...did some of Timothy's erstwhile friends sneer at the changes in his life that the conversion experience brought about?

At any rate, Timothy must have impressed Paul, for two years later, at the start of Paul's second missionary journey, as he returned to Lystra, Paul must have sought out young Tim and said, "I want you on my team that travels. Can you wrap things up here, and have your bag packed to leave with me the day after tomorrow?" Timothy probably blinked his eyes and caught his breath and said to Paul, "Look Paul, are you sure you've got the right man. I'm not even out of my teens. There's Deacon Brown over there...twice my age and three times my stature in this community. Maybe he's the man you should go after." "No" said Paul. "You're my man. I need you".

And so Paul ordained Timothy to the ministry of Jesus Christ and from that day on the younger man was to share with the older man the troubles and the triumphs, the depths and the heights of that First Century Christian leadership. Sometimes they traveled together as a team. More often, Timothy handled the special assignments at Paul's request, visiting the churches in Corinth and Ephesus and Thessalonica. Through it all, you sense a bond of complete trust and understanding between these two men. "My beloved son: grace, mercy and peace..." is the way Paul addresses Timothy in the two letters that bear his name. In these letters you can feel and measure the esteem and affection of the older man for the younger man.

We have a kind of last will and testament in which the aging apostle leaves his mantel to the junior member of the firm. Paul recalls that day, ~~my~~ fifteen years before, when he had ordained a young man into the ministry, and he recounts his satisfaction at the progress of the partnership. He knows that now, "the time of my departure is at hand". He feels that he has "fought a good fight, finished the course and kept the faith". (II Timothy 4: 7). He commends himself to God's ongoing faithfulness and he commends the Christian movement to Timothy's leadership under God's guidance.

There is a tradition that Timothy later returned to Ephesus and became the first Bishop of the Church there. It does not greatly matter what position he may have occupied later in his life. The important thing is that he was a vital link in "that endless line of splendor" between Calvary's Hill and our own lives. One day a teenager in Lystra was drawn to Christ and soon became a partner of Paul. One day, some years later, the same Paul bequeathed to the same young person a significant share of the leadership of the Christian expansion in the First Century.

CONFIDENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Timothy.

There are two observations suggested by the account of this partnership between Paul and

First-off, this is a story about an older person who placed a great deal of confidence in a young person. If Lystra was like any other town in any other place and age, I'll venture that there were murmurs of disapproval when Paul commissioned one so young and inexperienced as his lieutenant. I'm sure some heads shook disapproval and some tongues wagged,

"He's altogether too young. He doesn't know what it's all about. He just sees the adventure in it. Tim belongs to this mixed-up younger generation. Why...did you hear about that riot over in Iconium over the weekend. Now mind you, I'm not saying that Tim was involved in it, but that's the way most young people seem to be. I can't understand Paul. Choosing a boy like Timothy for a man-sized job!"

At least, this is pretty much what one generation has been saying about a succeeding generation since the beginning of time. The Old Testament tells us that when Goliath first saw David, "He disdained him...for he was but a youth." Not because of his size, mind you, but because of his youth. So it has ever been. The giants of one generation tend to disdain the youthful challengers of the next generation. And when in the First Century, Paul wrote to Timothy telling him not to let people look down on him because he was young, there is the implication that again some oldsters had expressed their disdain for youth.

"Don't let people look down on you because you are young" Paul advised Timothy. In one sense, our world hardly seems to need that advice. For in many ways, this is a young person's world. A youth of promise finds the doors swinging open to him - in sports, in education, in business, in science. Sometimes it appears that Paul's advice needs to be revised. "Don't let people look down on you because you are old."

On the other hand, however, there is also that way in which Paul's advice - unrevised - is timeless. "Let no one despise your youth" (I Timothy 4: 12)

There is a word of caution here for all of us who are older in its reminder that all around us are young people who are going through pretty much the same battles that we went through in the struggle toward an independent self-hood, and that often they need nothing so much as someone who will listen, someone who will understand, someone who will trust.

Kenneth Eaton, in a sermon in The Pulpit quoted from a letter written by a so-called young delinquent boy to his parents. The parents sent this letter to The Kansas City Star saying "maybe if we share this letter, it will help other parents." Let me read you several part of the letter.

A young man in the First Century found that need answered, presumably in the home, then in a great friendship. The friend earned the right to say, "Don't let people look down on you because you are young."

THE YOUNG MAN RESPONDED But now we need to look at the picture of the friendship between Paul and Timothy from another angle and realize that this is not only the story of an older man who placed great confidence in a youth. It is also the story of a youth who responded to the trust that was placed in him.

Paul wrote to Timothy,

"Don't let people look down on you because you are young." He went on to say, "see that they look up to you because you are an example to them in your speech and behavior, in your love and faith and sincerity."

If what we have been saying up to this point applies largely to older people, then what we are saying now applies largely to young people. It is one thing to ask people to trust you. It is quite another thing to demonstrate that the trust in you has not been misplaced. This was the great thing about Timothy. Like his youthful counterpart in every generation, he said, "Treat me as a grown up." And he proceeded to prove that he was really grown up!

I think part of our problem rests in an understanding of what we mean by being "grown up". So often we attach superficial meanings to that phrase. For a number of years now, it has been pointed out that the supreme symbol of maturity is the acquisition of a license to drive an automobile. ~~This particular milestone has all but been replaced in significance by the Bar Mizvah of the Jewish faith, or even the achievement of voting age as the sign of initiation into adulthood.~~

We need to be mindful of the fact that a person is not automatically "grown-up" because the state grants him permission to drive a car. Too many children get behind the driver's wheel - some aged 18, some aged 45, some aged 75. ~~Just so a person is not necessarily "grown-up" because he drives or because he or she dates, or because he or she is in high-school or college.~~

I've always appreciated "Dear Abby's" definition for "maturity". She once wrote: (a good test for all of us...)

"To be able to stick with a job until it's finished, to do one's job without being supervised, to be able to carry money without spending it, and be able to bear an injustice without waiting to get even".

I think Paul did some serious thinking about what it means to grow up. He said, "When I was a child, I acted like a child...when I became a man, I gave up childish things". In another place, he said, "We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Jesus Christ." He understood that real maturity is not so much a matter of age as of actions, not so much a matter of bodily growth, as of spiritual growth.

When a person really grows up, he grows out of self-centeredness into a sensitivity to the needs of others. He grows out of unpredictability into a dependability of word and deed. He grows from conformity into conviction. He grows from an obsession with pleasure into a concern with purpose. Both young people and adults need to be reminded of this from time to time. Freedom and responsibility are both sides of the same coin, the whole of which is maturity.

With the first part of Paul's advice to Timothy, every young person will certainly be in glad agreement: "Don't let people look down on you because you are young." Yes, but go on with the rest of his advice, "See that they look up to you because you are an example to them in your speech, your behavior - your love, your faith, your sincerity."

CLOSING WORDS In that section of Scripture read earlier in the service, there was that line "for the love of money is the root of all evil". It seemed appropriate that the Chairman of the Audit committee should get to read that. But a few verses later is the line which I would leave with you from Timothy's story and which we sang for the second hymn. Paul urged Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". This is a fine place to end the sermon and to leave you with that line, and with the encouragement to read both of Paul's Letter to Timothy. There's some sound advice and fine admonitions for both you and old alike.

PRAYER We are thankful, Our Father, for the lives of those who have gone before us marking the way, setting the example. And now may that spirit that was in thy young servant, Timothy, be also in all of us that we in our lives may set a high example of Christian character to all that we meet along life's pathway.

In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

"Fight the good fight with all thy might;
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;
Lay hold on life, and it shall be,
Thy joy and crown eternally"