

## Why Church? Mentors

### 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Two old church friends crossed paths in a coffee shop one day and took some time to catch up. “How’s Bethlehem these days?” asks one:

The other responds, “Oh, we don’t go there anymore. We didn’t like the pastor.”

We’ve heard that conversation many times, haven’t we? It has always surprised me that so many members from other congregations come to me grumbling about their pastor. Just as I’ve always been well aware of members that I serve grumbling to others about me. And if it’s not the pastor people are complaining about, its that the worship was too contemporary or the worship was too traditional. We didn’t connect with any of the groups in the church. The youth ministry was too much of a commitment or there was no youth ministry. They were always asking for money to keep the building up or to pay the staff. We began to enjoy sleeping in on Sunday mornings.

It reminds me of that old, old story about the man who never seemed willing to wake up for church. His wife tried and tried every week, but he refused to get up. She said, “Honey, come on. You’re going to be late for church.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want to go,” he mumbled.

“We go through this every Sunday. Why don’t you want to go?”

“Because I don’t like those people and I don’t like the pastor!”

She replied, “Honey, get out of bed and get dressed. You are the pastor!”

So if you don’t like the pastor, get in line. There are days when some pastors don’t even

like themselves. Kind of like the Brown's quarterback, people either love you, tolerate you, or flat out don't like you.

During my stay at the clinic last month, in the midst of writing this sermon, my nurse came into the room to weigh me on my first day there. She noticed I had my Bible open and was writing. After guessing correctly that she was the same age as my daughter – 24 – she shared with me the story of her grandfather, now passed away, who was a Missouri Synod pastor on the East side where she still lives. When I asked if she and her parents still worship at that church, she shook her head and explained that her father – the pastor's kid – doesn't like the pastor that's there now and is going to another church. Her father's two sisters, pastor's kids, are now Episcopalian priests because they could not become Lutheran pastors in their father's branch of Lutheranism.

The conversation reminded me that even pastor's kids and maybe especially pastor's kids can be very judgmental of other pastors.

But there was never a pastor in the history of the Christian Church that was as disliked as its first pastor – Paul. People complained that he wasn't as charismatic as the other preachers, once putting a young man to sleep during his sermon who fell backwards out the window of the house where they were worshipping. Paul wasn't attractive, being small in stature, rarely getting a hair cut, and living on the road either out of a tent, in someone's house, or often in a jail cell. In his letters, Paul complains constantly about how much he suffers and how much he's persecuted both by those in the church and outside the church. Despite it all, he loves what he's been called to do, to serve and shepherd Christ's flock.

In today's text from Paul's second letter to young Timothy, we have a wonderful example of an old and experienced pastor mentoring and encouraging a young and up and coming leader in the church named Timothy. When we look at the picture of Paul in these verses, we see him praying for Timothy, remembering shared experiences, longing to see him, and having a relationship where he's deeply impacted by the younger man he serves.

In verse 1, Paul affirms the promise of life found in Christ Jesus. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

Then in verse 3 and 4, Paul is praying for Timothy day and night and remembering and give thanks for their good times together. As Timothy's mentor, Paul is interactive, relational, caring, and full of emotion.

Unlike the pastor in a previous town where I served who preached at a funeral for a teenager who committed suicide. He spoke of eternal punishment and how this teenager would never go to heaven. He pontificated about all the problems with young people – drugs, music, greed, godlessness. He said nothing to comfort the family. He said nothing about God's forgiving grace and love. He said nothing that suggested that he was at all connected to the people he was suppose to be serving.

I've always tried to take it to the opposite extreme after experiences like that with other pastors. In the same previous town lived a very young man and woman who had a baby together unmarried. When I met with them to prepare for their baby son's baptism, I

encouraged her to continue to live with her parents to provide some stability for her and the baby. When the baby was almost a year old, the 20 year old father after partying all night and high on meth, came into his girlfriend's parent's home at 6:00 a.m., took the baby from his crib, sat him on his lap in the driver's seat of his car and sped out of town on a country road expecting no traffic on a Saturday morning. Going left of center around a curve side swiping an oncoming car, the baby flew out of his lap through his open window into the ditch, killing him. At the funeral, one family set on one side of the church and the other family on the other side of the church. It was one of the most difficult sermons I've ever preached. Even then I would not be the judge. It had to be a message of God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The young man was judged in court as it should be, but not in church.

Our New Testament challenges us to shepherd and serve and mentor those to whom we are connected to in the church. That is the message Paul is writing to Timothy when in verses 8 - 14, he writes these powerful words to his student and friend, Timothy . . . <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Paul is mentoring, Timothy, teaching Timothy, and most importantly calling to his heart. Paul switches to the first person. “Follow me as I follow Christ.” he’s saying. He isn’t just teaching about the Christian life. He models it. Puts flesh on it. Puts his feet and hands where his words have gone. He walks his talk as a mentor for Timothy and others.

Whether it be Paul or you or I, we are called to be mentors for the next generation. Why Church? Because here in this community we have both the calling and the opportunity to be mentors, to be examples, to be teachers; knowing that just like everyone else there will be times when we fall down or fail.

God has blessed me over years to mentor four very different seminary interns – three young men in Nebraska from Wartburg Seminary in Iowa who are now ordained pastors and Kay here at Divinity who did not return to seminary. God has also blessed me to mentor three young people who went on to college and seminary from congregations I was serving. And of course here in Divinity, I’m very proud of Tina Heise who was already out of high school when I arrived but who I’ve gotten to know much better in the past year as she prepares to begin seminary next fall.

Through all of this I’ve learned over and over again that the spiritual leadership and mentoring people desire is authentic, vulnerable, imperfect, and accessible. I’ve learned that pedestals belong under plants, not pastors. I’ve watched mega-churches led by Pastor Schuller,

Pastor Kennedy, and others struggle when they had to pass the baton to a new pastor. I've learned that pastors come and go and that the church will live on despite any one human being because the church is so much more than a person or personality. People who go to church or don't go to church because of the pastor, don't get it.

Why Church? To be mentored and filled and forgiven and called by Jesus Christ to be a mentor to others, to be a shepherd and servant of others that God has blessed us with on this life journey.

As God has been faithful from before the beginning of time, so will he be faithful in this time of church and mentoring, and so will he be faithful at the end.

May the peace of God . . .

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