

## **“Parting Words”**

### **2 Timothy 1:1-14**

Dear Pastor Doug, Council President Tony Chilia, and Planning Council,

I am writing to formally let you know that I will be resigning from my position as Minister of Music. My last Sunday at Divinity will be October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. I have a deep appreciation and gratitude for my time at Divinity. After much prayerful thought and consideration, and in agreement with my husband and family, the best decision for myself and my family at this time is to take a break from church work and explore some other career opportunities.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Divinity. I have been able to work in an atmosphere of love and care for one’s neighbor, and it has been such a blessing to be a part of the vital ministry that is Divinity. My family has grown up in this church, and I will forever cherish my time here. Please accept my deepest gratitude for all the support the congregation has shown over the last decade. I have grown and learned so much in these ten years, and it has been invaluable to me.

I am happy to do all I can to make this transition a smooth one, so please do not hesitate to reach out. I know I speak on behalf of our family when I say that Divinity is truly a wonderful church family. In Christ – Patricia Crane

As I remember and give thanks for so many musical experiences and personal interactions with Tricia and Ian over the past 10 years, I smile. Rummage sales, youth trips, luaus, the Hallelujah Chorus, Lord’s Prayer solos, and vocalizing with “Chosen” our contemporary band.

Presiding at your wedding, watching Phoebe and Alex grow up, betting with the ushers on whether you'd show up before or after the funeral begins, and being corrected when I introduced the wrong song because of a last-minute change. It's been very much like a father/daughter relationship, challenging, loving, and forgiving one another.

My last bit of advice... Take a few months off and then come and sit in the pews like normal parishioners. Except when I call you to sing or play the bagpipes at an occasional funeral. Thank you for sharing your gifts in serving God and God's people.

Another servant, the apostle Paul sees the specter of death hovering about him. But perhaps for the apostle for whom "death is gain" (Philippians 1:21), it was neither a specter nor angel of death, but a beam or angel of light that he sensed as he dictated his letter to Timothy, his son in the faith.

To properly understand the aging apostle's parting words, we need to focus on the context for a moment.

He wasn't *that* old, but the sum of his age plus the political situation in Rome was discouraging. He wasn't stupid; he knew that he was wobbling on the doorstep of death, and that the portal would open soon. "The time of my departure has come," he said (2 Timothy 4:6b). He sensed that time was slipping away: "I am already being poured out as a libation" (4:6a). He knew it was time to call a new pastor.

The year is A.D. 67. He's doing jail time in Rome for the second time under Nero, an emperor whose days are also drawing to a close. Nero would die about a year after Paul in A.D. 68 of assisted suicide. (Afraid to fall on his own sword, he asked a servant to do the deed.)

Nero had been emperor since A.D. 54, and it had not been a smooth ride. The Great Fire occurred in A.D. 64, during which Nero was famously, if not erroneously, accused of “fiddling.” At least 70 percent of the city was consumed in the blaze, and the Christian community was an easy target of abuse by mobs seeking to blame outsiders or foreigners for the catastrophe.

Church tradition says that the apostle Peter was a victim of this outrage and was crucified head down. Later, Paul was beheaded, and within three to four years, the young church had lost its two foremost apostles, including its most eloquent and learned voice — preacher and theologian, the apostle Paul.

However, the church was not without leaders. Although Peter and Paul were gone, a second generation of pastors was ready to carry the torch. One of these was Timothy, arguably Paul’s favorite and most devoted disciple. It is Timothy to whom Paul addresses his parting words. Paul knew Timothy’s mother and grandmother. He mentored Timothy in the fundamentals of the faith. Timothy served with him in Ephesus for about three years and was no doubt with him on many of Paul’s travels, including Troas, Philippi and Corinth.

He might have been introverted or uncomfortable with strangers, because in 1 Corinthians 16:10, Paul suggests that “when Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord.” His health was frail, and had he lived in an age of pharmaceuticals, he might have popped a fistful of pills every day. He is the patron saint of those with stomach disorders, based solely on the medical advice Paul offered in his first letter to Timothy: “No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23).

In any case, Paul thought highly of his young protégé saying that “I have no one like him,” and “Timothy’s worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel” (Philippians 2:19-23).

When Paul writes this final letter, Timothy had been pastor at Ephesus for perhaps as long as four years. And like Paul, Timothy would do jail time: “I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free” (Hebrews 13:23). Like Paul, he too endured suffering.

Paul’s last words to Timothy in these verses can be distilled into four reminders:

1. recharge your batteries
2. don’t apologize
3. hone your teaching skills
4. protect what you have

**Recharge your batteries.** Paul uses the word “rekindle,” which means to re-light the fire, suggesting the flames may have died, or that the fire is running low.

We are in the third year of a pandemic. We understand how energy, passion and enthusiasm can run low. We have all had the experience of passing through days, weeks and months of treading water. The spirit is flagging; the fuel is low. We’re going through the motions.

Paul suggests that Timothy find some tinder and light a match. The fire can be restarted by remembering that it first burst into flames “through the laying on of hands” (v. 6). In other words, the community of faith validated the gifts they saw in you, Timothy, and assured you in this rite of ordination, that God was with you.

If Timothy had a weakness, it might have been his insecurity, fear or timidity. “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,” Paul writes (v. 7). Paul had seen more danger in his lifetime than most of us will ever have to face. Timothy had been a part of some of these adventures.

Now, Paul tells Timothy that living for Jesus requires courage, not cowardice. In today’s language, Paul might have told Timothy to put on his big-boy pants, lace up his boots and saddle up.

He might also ask Timothy if he has his keys, the keys to success: power, love and self-discipline. If you have these keys, there’s no limit to the possibilities!

**Don’t apologize.** No need to be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ! Jesus was a witness more than 2,000 years ago to the love of God, and his life, death and resurrection was prophesied through the testimony of prophets like Moses and Elijah long before Christ was born. So, there’s no reason to cough, choke, turn away or be embarrassed to identify oneself as a follower of Jesus.

We *might* be ashamed — even mortified — of the behavior of some who call themselves Christians, but so was the apostle Paul, who despaired of those who loved the world more than they loved Jesus.

Timothy must do his best to present himself as one approved by God, to be “a worker who has no need to be ashamed” (2:15). We are not ashamed because we “know the one in whom I have put my trust,” and we know that he is able to protect us in uncertain times (v. 12). There is not much one can be certain of anymore, but we know Someone who is trustworthy, and Someone who will take care of our eternal investment. No need to apologize!

**Hone your teaching skills.** “Hold to the standard of sound teaching,” Paul writes (v. 13). The standard to which the apostle refers is his own teaching! “As you have heard from me” (v. 13). Four key words in this advice: hold, standard, sound, teaching.

For example, sound teaching is so important that Paul suggests that it be firmly grasped. You might decide that you can loosen your grip on other things but hang on to sound teaching.

And not just teaching, but the “standard” of sound teaching. Follow the core curriculum in a way that is understandable or makes sense. Know the people. Show how your teaching is relevant to their lives. Make sure that the people understand the learning goals; help them to take ownership of their own learning.

The teaching or lessons should be “sound,” that is, rational and intellectually within reach of the average Jill or Joe. Sound teaching for Paul probably didn’t include a prosperity gospel, a therapeutic gospel of self-help nor a “God is my buddy” gospel. Don’t be seduced by theological fads, he might say.

He mentioned “sound teaching” in his first letter (1 Timothy 4:6) and urged the inexperienced pastor to “have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales” (4:7). To offer teaching that is sound will require persistence, he says later in his second letter. In his teaching, Timothy must “convince, rebuke, and encourage, [and] with the utmost patience” (2 Timothy 4:2). Paul saw that a “time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths” (4:3-4). Sounds familiar!

Clearly, Paul had his reasons for urging Timothy to sharpen his teaching skills.

**Protect what you have.** “Guard the good treasure God has given you” (2 Timothy 1:14).

What you have is a treasure. Regard it as such. Paul said something similar in his first letter to his young disciple: “Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (1 Timothy 6:20). What he has is his faith and his pastoral calling, and this is who he is: a person with faith and a calling. Don’t lose it. It’s who you are. It defines you. Paul says, in effect, “Don’t do anything that might compromise it, or set you on a course that veers away from your current bearings. Be aware of your heading and flight plan. Follow your True North, which is Jesus Christ your Lord.”

These are Paul’s parting words to the young man who was a trainee, intern and then a co-worker with the apostle. His advice to Timothy was that he should not forget to recharge his batteries. He shouldn’t apologize. He should hone his teaching skills and protect what he has. His words are a challenge to Timothy to pick up the mantle, to live a life of daring discipleship.

### **Keeping the Faith**

Church tradition indicates that this is precisely what Timothy did. He was the bishop of Ephesus for many years. In A.D. 97, at the advanced age of 80, a formerly timid Timothy, often in poor health, tried to halt a pagan festival in honor of the Greek goddess Diana, which included a procession of idols, ceremonies and songs. In response to his preaching of the gospel, the angry crowds beat him, dragged him through the streets and stoned him to death.

In his dying moments, perhaps he recalled the words of his father in the faith, who wrote, “Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3). Like his mentor before him, he too had fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith (4:7).

May there be more of his kind, and may the peace of God . . .

#517 – Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word.