

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 2 Timothy 1:1–14**

**Sermon: “Deposit of Faith”**

In our Old Testament reading the prophet Habakkuk obeys the command to stand guard at his watch-post and cries for the Lord to answer him out of the silence. Disciples keep God’s commandments and proclaim his salvation, as is their duty. The sermon text from 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy provides a portrait of the faith of young Timothy, who kept God’s command to preach and rejoiced in his salvation, which he first received from the matriarchs in his home and into which he was ordained with the laying on of hands. The Collect summarizes:

*“Grant that those things which we ask in faith we may receive through [his] bountiful mercy.”*

Even before the whacky world of Facebook and Google, whose “powers-that-be” seem to know us better than we know ourselves, many of us were taught by our parents not to eavesdrop on private conversations. Paul’s second letter to Timothy was intended primarily for Timothy, of course.

Here Paul, an apostle of Christ by the will of God, addresses Timothy as his “beloved child” and writes one of the most personal correspondences in the entire New Testament, full of grace and mercy and peace in Christ Jesus. But this letter, along with 1 Timothy and Titus, are preserved for public reading and preaching in the Church to the end of days. This timely letter from Paul reminds Timothy of something he calls “the good deposit,” which we understand that the good deposit of faith is worth guarding even with our lives

***“By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us,” Paul writes to Timothy, “guard the good deposit entrusted to you”*** (v 14). The “good deposit.” is probably best understood as all the faithful teaching of the Scriptures, the faith that we Christians believe. How had Timothy received this deposit, these teachings? Paul reminds young Pastor Timothy of his Christian heritage: Grandma Lois, who was known and instructed by Paul (Acts 16:1–2) and Mother Eunice, who followed the faith of her mother and of Paul.

We can already sense Paul's fatherly tone, for he is their father in the faith. No wonder Paul and Timothy desperately longed to see one another again soon! And some of us can relate to this idea. I would venture to guess that every one of us is a Christian today not because we made a decision to follow Jesus, for spiritually dead sinners cannot decide to come back to life. Rather, a faithful parent (or maybe a grandparent?) brought us to the font, or perhaps a friend brought you into the Church as an adult. Our faith in Christ, though it is likened to a tiny mustard seed, is great because it receives Christ and his teaching, uniting us as his own special people.

So, what is Timothy to do with this deposit of faith? Listen to Timothy's orders: "***Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands***" (v 6). Most scholars in our faith tradition see the "laying on of hands" as an early ordination (order) into the preaching office. No wonder Paul tells Timothy to "fan into flame" the "testimony about our Lord" and to "***share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God***" (v 8).

Picture it this way: the coals in your Weber grill “ashed over” while you went inside to take a phone call. When you return, you blow on the coals to keep the flame alive. In this way, Paul says, in effect, “Preach the Word, Timothy, even if you suffer for it—as I, Paul, am in prison and facing death for preaching the truth—for the preached Word of the cross and resurrection contains the fire of the Holy Spirit!” Yes, it’s worth even dying for.

But why? Why fan into flame this unique gift and be willing to die for it? It’s all for the sake of Christ! Right in the middle of our Scripture lesson, Paul reminds Timothy and all of us that Christ Jesus **“saved us and called us to a holy calling”** (v 9). Yes, he saved each of us, who could never save ourselves, by becoming man, by keeping the Law in our place, and by dying on the cross for our sins. Our salvation is part of God’s **“purpose and grace, which he gave [us] in Christ Jesus before the ages began”** (v 9), yes, even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3–14).

Even when we were conceived in sin, born to die, and alienated from God, he had it all planned in Christ, ***“who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel”*** (v 10). Christ Jesus conquered death by his own death and published this victory through his resurrection, which compelled the first witnesses ancient and modern to fan into flame this Word of the Gospel, even to the end of days.

A daunting task, indeed! But above young Timothy stood not only St. Paul to support and encourage him, but also God himself. Paul, preacher of the cross, apostle of God, and teacher of the faith was suffering in prison. Where he would eventually loose his head to Nero’s cruel sword. But in the midst of this suffering, Paul said, ***“I am convinced that [God] is able to guard until that [last] day what has been entrusted to me”*** (v 12). Did you catch the teamwork here? Paul was entrusted with the deposit of the Christian faith, with severe penalties for being unfaithful. Paul, in turn, has entrusted young Pastor Timothy to do the same.

But at work behind all of this was God himself, who sent his Son, who gave us Christian teaching, and who will guard it until the end of time, even if sometimes it seems that the true Church has perished.

Listen to some details on exactly what Pastor Timothy was to do for the flock: ***“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus”*** (v 13).

Raising up young Timothy as his “vicar,” Paul no doubt instructed him at great length in the doctrine of the apostles, using the Old Testament as the “required textbook” and the New Testament as verbal sermons on the Old. And the Gospel, while it is more than “just words,” takes words! The Good News of Jesus Christ and all that he has taught was left to us as sacred words, words which we ourselves hear and believe as the Scriptures are read and preached in this church. In so doing, we stand in continuity with Paul’s charge to ***“guard the good deposit entrusted to you”*** (v 14).

That is to say, the Faithful—Lois and Eunice, Timothy and Paul, you and I guard the entire deposit of Christian doctrine (that is, “the faith”), with pastors leading the way to green pastures, and the flock faithfully following to feed on Christ himself.

We sing in one ordination hymn, **“Each age its solemn task may claim but once; Make each one nobler, stronger than the last”** (LSB 682:1). The task of preaching, baptizing, and feeding the flock has passed from generation to generation, across the years and across the miles.

I am ordained to guard the deposit of the faith in this place. And you, a noble and strong generation of believers, have a vital role in this solemn task, specifically to receive faithfully the forgiveness and salvation as they are freely given here in the Word and in the Sacraments. And when the final trumpet sounds, we will say, ***“We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty”*** (Luke 17:10).

Amen