

“Spiritual Synergy”

2 Timothy 1:1-14

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Many people continue to get a good laugh from the old TV show “Seinfeld”. The daily adventures of a group of utterly self-absorbed friends who made a big deal out of nothing. The last show found them in a courtroom where they all were on trial after they failed to help a carjacking victim. They lived their whole life with apathy, with lack of concern for others. They lacked compassion. Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer were unwilling to love and care for their community, and they resisted the community’s love and care for them. At the trial they are each charged with “criminal indifference”. They listen as witness after witness testifies against them. They are found guilty of “criminal indifference” and are sent to prison to contemplate their shallow lives. Even behind bars their callous, self-centered indifference for others continues. They continue mindless chatter about nothing. George complains about the poor service from the guards. Elaine frets about how to make a socially correct phone call from prison. Jerry gives a senseless comedy show for the inmates. Kramer fidgets and contorts his body.

How would North church do if all of us found ourselves on trial from criminal indifference? How would you and your family do? Who would testify on your behalf? Would there be a long line of witnesses pointing out your concern, compassion, grace, love, and care for them? Would the courtroom be packed with people testifying about your passion for community?

Today is World Communion Sunday and Peacemaking Sunday. We gather to praise God for community and the enlightenment we receive when we welcome and celebrate diversity. Reflect over your life. Has your faith be nourished by others? Have you received strength for the journey by others? Have you found healing from others? Have you delighted in the love of others? Faithful Christians excel at being in relation with those around them whether a victim or family, whether a homebound neighbor or friends, whether a person in need on the other side of the world or a listening ear for the person sitting beside you this morning. Today all over the world and across denominational lines, Christians are celebrating our unity in God. While you were still asleep, the sun awoke people in the East. They gathered to worship, prayed for us, and celebrated communion. Now it is our turn. This will continue all around the world even after we settle into bed tonight for the sun will still be shining on communion celebrations in the west.

Criminal indifference was not the charge against the Apostle Paul. He found himself in prison for being bold and courageous for God, for having a zealous passion for helping others experience God’s love. Experiences of God’s grace transformed Paul’s life. Paul discovered the joy, hope, peace, and love that God offers all of us. Paul got glimpses of how God is working to redeem everything and everyone. For Paul, God’s love was too wonderful, glorious, and spectacular to be indifferent, to keep it to himself. Paul risked everything to share God’s love, to ensure people that they are forgiven, to help people discover the transformational joy of God. Paul gave up his career and a comfortable lifestyle. He endured shipwrecks, constant travel, being mocked, ridiculed, and beaten to spread the good news of Jesus. He was passionate about helping another town, another person, discover the grace of God and the joy of a relationship with Jesus.

The Roman Emperor Nero wanted people to worship him as God. Since Christians would only worship the Triune God, Nero hated Christians and tried to rid the earth of every Christian. He secretly burned a large section of Rome then blamed the fire on the Christians. He took jobs away from Christians and imprisoned them, yet Christianity still grew. Nero made a spectacle of slaughtering Christians in a variety of ways. Nero was about to execute Paul and Paul knew it. 2 Timothy is believed to be Paul’s last letter. His famous last words so to speak. If you knew you were writing your final words to one of the most loved people in your life, what would you say?

2 Timothy 1:1-14 NLT “This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. I have been sent out to tell others about the life God has promised through faith in Christ Jesus. I am writing to Timothy, my beloved child. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace. Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. I long to see you again, for

I remember your tears as we parted. And I will be filled with joy when we are together again. I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for God. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. God did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was God's plan from before the beginning of time—to show us God's grace through Christ Jesus. And now God has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. God broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News. That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that God is able to guard what I have entrusted to God until the day of Jesus' return. Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you."

Paul begins, "Grace, mercy, and peace from God to you." We explored this phrase together a month ago in Paul's letter to Philemon. Praising God for the refreshing ripples of grace and peace radiating out from God, through us, and touching those around us. Hopefully each of us is inspired to reach out paying forward God's grace, goodness and peace to an ever-widening circle of people around us.

Paul reminds Timothy of community, the interconnectedness and continuity of his family of faith. Paul urges Timothy to be bold, courageous, and passionate in sharing his gifts and love with the entire world. Paul writes, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason, I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gifts God created within you; for God did not give us a spirit of fear and timidity, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." Fan the flame and keep ablaze is also translated rekindle the gift. To grasp the urgency of this phrase, you need to imagine that you are all alone, wet, and cold on the verge of hypothermia, that often happens on a survivor show. After several hours of work, you manage to get a spark and a tiny frail flame, then with great care and intensity you nourish that flame into a roaring, hot, life-saving fire. This is how each of us is to nourish and share our gifts with the world. Not indifferent, timid or shy rather bold, passionate and red hot. When you nourish and share your gifts then the Holy Spirit fuels them with power, love and compassion creating a spiritual synergy radiating transformational love. Paul continues, "So you must never be ashamed to tell others about the Lord." In Timothy's context, never being ashamed to share your faith meant you likely would be beaten and could end up being executed. Why be bold for God? Paul writes, "Since the appearance of our Savior, nothing could be plainer: death defeated, life vindicated in a steady blaze of light, all through the work of Jesus." Therefore, "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you with the help of the Holy spirit living in us." Rekindle, fan the flame, keep ablaze, guard the treasure, your gifts, so nothing will ever dampen your fire. Do this not for yourself, but for others, so all can share in the warmth of God's love, rejoicing in spiritual synergy.

We all are called to share the gospel, to carry the love, grace, joy, and peace of God wherever we go and be bold in sharing it. We, too, have excellent examples of faith. Paul's encouragement is to daily remain faithful, nurture your gifts, and be bold in sharing God's love. Our natural inclination is to be indifferent, to allow our faith to remain private, something we observe at home and at church with other like-minded people. Our calling goes beyond this to be living witnesses in all that we do. When we fail to radiate the joyful love of God by sharing our gifts in every aspect of our life, we communicate fear, doubt, and even shame of Jesus.

Fear, worry, anxiety is not from God. Many of our fears are unfounded. Many people cling to indifference. Most people resist change and are uneasy about the unknown. Most people strive to maintain the status quo. Fear is never from God. We must let go of fear to love. Examine your strained and nonexistent relationships. Are you holding onto an element of fear? Name that fear, describe that fear, so you can ask God to enable you to let that fear go, so you can love and nurture that relationship. World Communion, Peacemaking Sunday is a day to let go of our fear, so we can reach out with love to all people.

What are your gifts? What do you love to do that brings joy to others? What skills, wisdom, and life experiences can you share that will enrich another's life. You are created in the image of God. What in you radiates goodness, healing, creativeness, forgiveness, peace, love, and joy? How can you nurture these gifts, share them and be bold giving God the glory? When we come together in community and share our gifts, we get a more complete picture of God. Imagine that every person in the world is a unique jigsaw puzzle piece. The more people you connect with the more complete is your perception of God. By ourselves each of our gifts may seem small, but when interconnected with others they set the world ablaze with the light of God.

A missionary found it necessary to be gone from his family for an extended period of time. Aware that his leaving would not be understood by his youngest daughter, he placed in his coat pocket a rare treat in that part of the world a bright red apple to give her as he boarded the train. Finally, the moment came. He embraced his wife and each of the older children. And then it was his youngest daughter's turn. Picking her up in his arms, he pressed the apple into her tiny hand, hoping that this special gift would soften the impact of his leaving. But instead, as he looked back from the slowly departing train, he saw the apple slip from her hand and roll across the platform. Tears streaming down her face, she ran alongside the train sobbing, Daddy, I don't want what you give I want you!

The mystery of the Incarnation. God gives us more than things. God gives us Godself. God gave us Jesus in human flesh. God gives each of us the Holy Spirit. Let each of us give of ourselves to one another, living in community, boldly share our gifts, being peacemakers, faithful stewards and celebrating God's uniting grace, goodness, joy, and peace. Each of us has the Holy Spirit within us. Each of us is gifted to incarnate the grace, joy, and peace of God to others. The time is almost here for us to join the world-wide, joyful communion feast. Amen