

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021

2 Timothy 1:1-18 (No shame)

Talk by Russell Jones, Prayers by Hazel Willson

Welcome to this morning's service where we can enjoy where we can enjoy a time of worship and prayer together. We're starting a new series on the book of 2 Timothy, but before we come to that Hazel will begin by leading us in our intercessions.

### **Prayers**

Philippians 4:13 says; 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me'.

Our loving heavenly Father, thank you for Your faithful love, and many promises that You will never leave us on our own. Thank you too, for Your amazing grace, mercy forgiveness and strength.

We confess that so often we ignore Your strength and presence, and we ask again for Your forgiveness for putting ourselves at the centre of our lives instead of You, and failing therefore to be bold in our witness. We acknowledge again the sacrifice and victory of our Lord Jesus, which enables us to claim that forgiveness.

Creator God – this day is, among other things, World Population Day – and once again we marvel that You are the creator and sustainer of every person who has ever lived. Our human minds can't comprehend such numbers, but we thank you that You have the whole world in Your mighty hands.

God of compassion, for the huge numbers of the world population who are facing difficulties and challenges we pray. For all caught up in conflicts between and within nations; for those suffering due to climate change – extreme temperatures, forest fires, floods; and for all experiencing coronavirus without the resources to cope. We pray for those under oppressive or dictatorial regimes, and all whose beliefs result in hatred, vulnerability and injustice for them. We lift Your persecuted church to You, and pledge ourselves to pray, to give, and to help in whatever way we can. We ask Your strength for them in their weakness, and that they will not be ashamed of Your gospel for salvation.

Generous and gracious Father, thank you for Your gifts available to all who love You. The Spirit has given each one of us (not some of us, or a few of us) a special way of serving others, and we pray that we will be able to extract our own unique gifts and abilities to be a part of Your solution in our society. Build Your church Lord – brick by brick, life by life, and make us willing to be used. Thank you for all the ways in which Holy Trinity and St John's are at present serving others in body, mind and soul – and we pray that as we move forward under and alongside a new vicar – there will be more ways to bring Your love to the people of this area.

God of variety, we pray that Christians in all walks of life may be salt and light to others. We pray for those in politics, justice, business, health, education and entertainment. At this time

we particularly think of those with sporting abilities – for those in football, tennis, and preparing for the Olympics. Be with them in their rigorous training – so similar to the training for the Christian life – putting aside all that would hinder and impede, to win an earthly prize. Make them generous in victory, and resilient and gracious in defeat – above all, not ashamed to witness to the ultimate prize of eternal life through Jesus.

Loving Father, we pray for cohesion, respect and wisdom as we come out of lockdown restrictions. Give leaders and people a sense of responsibility and care for others; and may the balance between safety, economic growth, and good mental health be achieved. We pray for all suffering from coronavirus, and those who care for them. We pray for all those known to us, who are not well in body, mind or spirit, and lift them to You in silence now.....

Gracious Father, we pray for ourselves, and humbly ask that in all our ways we may acknowledge You, and know for certain that You will direct our paths. May we be prepared to suffer for doing good, and be worthy ambassadors for Christ day by day.

Let us end with the words of a song: (originally written by John Pantry for The Boys' Brigade)

I am not ashamed to belong to Jesus  
I am not ashamed to stand my ground  
For there is no higher cause, than working for the King,  
to Him I lift my praise, for I am not ashamed.  
What then shall I fear? What shall daunt my spirit?  
Sure and steadfast, anchored firm to the cross.  
Standing with my brothers, serving God and others,  
Though the world may ridicule, I'll still say, 'I am not ashamed'

We ask all these prayers in the mighty name of Jesus, and in the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

### **Reading – 2: Timothy 1**

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

**2** To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

**3** I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. **4** Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. **5** I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

**6** For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. **7** For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. **8** So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. **9** He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, **10** but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour,

Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup> And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. <sup>12</sup> That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

<sup>13</sup> What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

<sup>15</sup> You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

<sup>16</sup> May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. <sup>17</sup> On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. <sup>18</sup> May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

This is the Word of the Lord – **thanks be to God**

### **Talk**

Good morning everyone. We are starting to read through 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy this morning, the last of Paul's letters in the Bible. Almost all of the other letters were written to churches that Paul had helped to start, such as the books to the churches in Ephesus and Philippi, and were messages for public reading, but this one is to an individual and it's very personal. Timothy had been a co-worker and minister with Paul on his travels, and was the leader of the church in Ephesus at the time. It's a touching letter because Paul knew he was nearing the end of his life and expected to be executed soon. He was in Rome and had been imprisoned for a second time during the persecution of Christians by the emperor Nero. After his first arrest years earlier, he had been kept in a comfortable house arrest with visitors who enabled him to continue his mission. This time he was chained in a dungeon, cold and lonely, and his friends couldn't find out where he was. Even worse for him, he was afraid that his work founding and supporting churches was being undone by opposition and false teaching. All these details are mentioned in passing in the letter, but he was full of faith and hope despite these hardships.

Paul wanted Timothy to join him to offer companionship and practical help, but he was also concerned about the church in Ephesus that he loved and offers advice to his younger friend on how to care for the Christians there. This book speaks to us individually about our faith and how we are to sustain it over the years; Paul also helps us to understand the importance for every church of faithfully teaching and responding to the gospel message.

Timothy was young and had been thrust into a very responsible position of church leadership, difficult to fulfil for someone like him, not only because of his age but because he was a shy and timid person. If you're someone who feels strong in belief but awkward when expressing that belief, not a natural leader or evangelist, then this letter will speak strongly to you. Paul was also worried about a dangerous idea that had crept into believers' minds, and like most two thousand year old heresies, it is still around today. More on that in future weeks.

The first part of the chapter reveals much about Timothy's background and personality, and his relationship with Paul, who calls him 'my dear son'. He asks for 'grace, mercy and peace', which is not a routine greeting at all – it is a picture of gospel salvation. Grace is the gift from God that is offered to us though we have done nothing to deserve it. Mercy is what the good Samaritan showed to the injured man, a saving action to those who can't help themselves, and peace is a reconciliation that brings harmony into a spoiled life, the practical result of receiving grace and mercy. When he greets churches, Paul greets them with a desire for 'grace and peace' but when he writes to individual ministers like Timothy he adds 'mercy' into the greeting. He knows that church leaders need mercy!

Paul recalls Timothy's tears, showing that Timothy found his separation from Paul to be deeply upsetting, and that a reunion, even in a prison, would 'be filled with joy'. He mentions that Timothy's grandmother was a Christian convert and that his mother continued to raise him in faith, and in chapter 3 he mentions that the earlier generations taught the child from the Old Testament writings. As well as his upbringing and friendship with Paul, who had also been shown mercy by Jesus on the road to Damascus, when he was called to be an apostle, Timothy had received a special calling. There is what our family, our friends and our education give us, but there is also what God gives us. He had to look after this special gift, a spiritual endowment of some kind, as verse 6 says: 'I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands'. That might make you think of the time you were confirmed, if you have been, when the bishop laid hands on you and asked the Holy Spirit to bless your future life as a Christian.

The gift was present but perhaps the initial fire had died down because Paul wrote 'fan into flame', that is exercise the gift, use the strength God has put into you. We all know that when we stop doing something for a while, we become rusty at it, unable to do it as well as we used to. Even a world champion will lose if they stop practising. It is the same here, and the next words hint at why Timothy might not exercise his God-given gift, because he was a shy, timid person who didn't like to show 'a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline'. It is God's power in him, but it isn't to be exercised in asserting himself because it is a power to serve – a desire to act differently has to be kept in check by self-discipline. I suppose this is true of every one of us as well. We have some experience of God's forgiveness, of his salvation, of his power at work in our lives, but it's combined with our personalities and histories, so there's divine gift and there's personal human responsibility, to be balanced and used together to serve in God's kingdom here.

'So do not be ashamed to testify about Jesus'. This is the reason behind the encouragement given here. Plenty of people might expect you to be ashamed, but have no shame. They might say 'Why do you think someone who was executed 2000 years ago is still alive? What's that got to do with us?' Or they might point to Christians who have mistreated others like paedophile priests, or make an offensive assumption about your opinions such as thinking that you must disapprove of gay people. Faced with this, it's easy to be timid and appear powerless rather than be empowered by God's Spirit, knowing it might lead to suffering. This is the heart of this first chapter. Paul had experienced it; in verse 16 he writes that another friend Onesiphorus 'was not ashamed of my chains', unlike 'everyone in the province of Asia, including Phygelus and Hermogenes' who had deserted him. They had seen their leader, the apostle who brought them the gospel message, locked up in prison in chains, and they were ashamed to be associated with him. Onesiphorus didn't, even though

he had to struggle to find out where Paul was being kept in Rome. He risked his own reputation and looked after his friend and fellow follower of Christ.

Don't be ashamed of me, the Lord's prisoner, Paul says. It might well have made Timothy's life and ministry easier to go with the crowd but that would be a mistake, because although Paul was the emperor's prisoner in the world's eyes, he was actually the Lord's prisoner, held by God's permission. Don't be ashamed to witness to Christ crucified and raised; don't be ashamed to be associated with Christ's people – this is the message. In verse 12 we can see his affirmation: 'I know in whom I have believed'. It's not an idea, a philosophy, in which he believes – it is a person in whom he believes. He had met the risen Jesus in person on the road to Damascus, and he had deposited his soul that day to be guarded and kept safe by Jesus. He knows that he will guard it until 'that day' when Jesus returns again.

Timothy has been given a deposit to guard as well, the deposit of the gospel, and as soon as he mentions it, he refers to God who has saved us and called us to a holy life. He has saved us by taking our sins on himself at the cross, and then slowly transforms us through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us – he has 'destroyed death'. The cross achieved it. The resurrection revealed it. The gospel 'brought life and immortality into the light'. We are called to guard the gospel – it's our greatest treasure – but also to witness to the gospel, and even to suffer for it. The gospel has always been unpopular because it humbles people too much. Can you imagine those currently holding political power admitting they act corruptly out of self-interest? Of course not, because their values are such that they think self-promotion, self-interest and greed are right; those people embody the rejection of Christian principles in public life, and therefore break the law based on those principles. In a world where people vote for such leaders – despite knowing they are self-serving liars - we can't expect to be welcomed when we bring a message of humility, justice and integrity.

Confident, and thoroughly educated in Old Testament Scriptures, the persecutor Paul had been called by God with a voice of thunder and three days of blindness; Timothy had been raised as a Christian by his mum and gran, and received the Holy Spirit from Paul. So why us? Why should we be the ones to receive this amazing salvation, this great promise? We don't know; Paul doesn't know. He simply tells us that 'it is not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace'. God's choice of us is unfathomable, but it does carry a meaning in its mystery. We can't know why God makes his choices but we do know that we must respond with gratitude and be humble, knowing we haven't earned the gift he has given. We can also feel inner peace because we know that God's grace safeguards our lives, before and after earthly death, and we can trust him to fulfil his own purpose of grace. We can trust.

Here is a prayer to finish.

**A prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, we thank you again and again for your outpouring of grace in our lives. Strengthen us when we are timid or afraid; help us to speak your truth; grant us inner peace rooted in our trust of your loving purpose for us, we pray. Amen.