“Giving Thanks, Remembering, Mentoring”
2 Timothy 1:1-14 sermon
By Rev Berry French on 10/2/16, World Communion Sunday
Black Mountain Presbyterian Church

Introduction to the text:
The lectionary takes us to the New Testament book of 2nd Timothy. The book of 2nd Timothy is really a letter, claimed to have been written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, Paul's most well-known protégé. Almost all scholars agree that Paul didn't actually write the letter, but rather it was written by a well-meaning Christian author several decades after Paul's death, using Paul's name to say what Paul would have said. Now, before we get offended, this practice was pretty common in the first and second centuries – people did this at the time. 2nd Timothy stands as Scripture as one of the Pastoral Epistles.

Just know that like most books in the latter half of the New Testament, 2nd Timothy is a letter, written from one person to another, likely meant for at least that local Christian community to overhear ... and now we're overhearing this letter a couple millennia later. 2nd Timothy imagines that the Apostle Paul would have been writing this letter very near the end of his life, almost as farewell instructions and encouragement. I encourage you to take notice of the ways this Scripture talks about gratitude and remembering.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:1-14
Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 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 rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 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, 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, 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. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 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.

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Sermon
Giving Thanks and Remembering. Both gratitude and remembrance are central to these final words of instruction attributed to Paul. And it seems fitting as a farewell letter – for every time we gather as a community of faith to celebrate a life and witness to the resurrection, those are the two things we primarily do: Remember and Give thanks.

2
timothy starts with gratitude by looking back at the past –
• the ancient past to anchor his faith in God with our Jewish ancestors of the faith,
• the recent personal past,
• and to the previous generation: Timothy's own mother and grandmother are named personally.

After the standard letter greeting, we hear:
I am grateful to God—whom I worship, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers. 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.

Remembering is important and so I want to invite us to do our own remembering and naming of our mentors of the faith. I invite you to take a full minute and remember those who have had the greatest influence in your faith. You can think of one specific person, or several folks who have shaped your faith. They can be family members or mentors or folks you no longer know but taught you about Jesus. If you're comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes and spend a full minute in your memories. [55 seconds of silence]

If you can, begin to wrap. And I imagine this may have happened for some of you already, but take a few more seconds and give thanks to God specifically for them. [10 seconds of silence]

If the person is still in your life, I encourage you to be in touch with them this afternoon or sometime this week just to say “Thank you.” A call, a letter, an email, a text, a message ... just some way to express your appreciation.
Now as today is World Communion Sunday, and we'll be celebrating communion with a focus on the global church, I'd also encourage you to spend 20 seconds thinking about someone from another country who has influenced your faith. Take some time to remember them, remember the lessons learned, and give thanks. [15 seconds of silence]

Remembering is important. As I think about my own faith development there are so many who have shaped my faith. The truth is, the only way that any of us come to faith is because someone told us about Jesus and showed us the love of Christ. In the words of theologian Will Willimon:

*You can’t be born with faith; faith must be given. You can’t discover Christianity through long walks alone in the woods, rummaging around in your ego, or thinking deep thoughts in the library. You must receive this faith; you must be given faith in Christ by someone else. Faith is gift all the way down. Those who walked before us, saints of the past, can show us the way to Christ. There is humility in this. If you have faith in Christ, then it’s because somebody loved you and Christ enough to tell you the stories, live the faith before you, and show you the way.*

*None of us created this faith for ourselves; none of us achieved this faith through our constructive thinking about God. All of us are empty-handed receivers.*

Now my story involves parents and grandparents, youth advisors and childhood friends, pastors and Montreat conference leaders. My mentors who led and also participated in Sunday school classes and summer camps, campus ministry and seminary all have shaped my faith. I imagine that your faith story has a few of those and some others. We all have our own Loises and Eunices and Pauls ... **Each of us has been mentored** by a web of folks whom God has used to shape our faith.

I am reminded of my childhood best friend Brian Schultz. Schultz and I were in the same Presbyterian preschool, and then church youth group. Somehow by the grace of God, Schultz and I started meeting weekly at the Waffle House for breakfast before high school to talk about life and faith and what it meant to follow Jesus … and we prayed together. As a high school student God was using Schultz to shape my faith.

The two years between college and seminary, I spent several months traveling through Central America and Southern Africa. I remember with fondness individuals in Guatemala and Honduras; South Africa, Zambia, and Malawi who taught me that God’s church was alive and well in the world, and that there are a variety of ways to do church and many flavors of theology and missiology. Through a slew of individual missionaries and local Christians, God widened my view of the church and her expressions of worship and service in a global context.
A few months after my college graduation, Jason, a college roommate and I spent 4 months backpacking through Central America and staying with all kinds of ex-patriate and missionaries and local Christians whom we had somehow found some shoestring of a connection and an email address for.

After spending a month in language school in Antigua, Guatemala, Jason and I caught a chicken bus to Southwestern Guatemala where we spent 10 days with the first Presbyterian-ordained Guatemalan clergywoman and her family. Dina was a proud Presbyterian clergy serving several small rural churches, active with her Presbytery, and helping to raise her grandson.

Jason and I somehow got in touch with Dina through Presbyterian connections that had their roots in the likes Pete Peery and Ellen Dozier. I emailed Dina and she and her husband Angle agreed to host us for 10 days in their humble Guatemalan home far off the travel guides’ maps in a town about 30 miles away from San Antonio – where our partner church, Eben Ezer, is.

When we arrived in Dina’s town, she greeted us at the bus stop, easily recognizing us as we were the only white folks on the bus. We never once saw another gringo the whole time we traveled with Dina around to all her small churches and to Presbytery meetings up on the Mexican border. Dina lived across the street from an open space that served as the soccer field for the town’s children. Dina’s 8 year old grandson helped Jason and I partake in the daily soccer games that started up before dusk each day with the neighborhood kids.

• The hospitality and the genuine faith of Dina and Angel have inspired me all these years and continue to give me hope in the face of despair.
• The memory of evening soccer games with boys and girls 4 and 8 and 12 years old with a flat soccer ball continue to remind me of the hope and potential that is imbedded into each child of God around the globe.
• The way that those tiny church communities we hiked into with Dina worshiped and prayed and gathered to share with us their indigenous foods and humble homes have encouraged and inspired my own sense of generosity and hospitality.

God uses people to shape our faith and our lives. On World Communion Sunday, we are invited to remember and give thanks for those faces and memories. Today on this World Communion Sunday, we are reminded that the church is much, much larger than we typically envision.

There are 2.2 billion Christians in the world today - a third of the global population. And while the United States boasts the largest number of Christians, only 11% of today’s Christians live in the States. One out of four Christians lives in Africa, and one out of 8 Christians lives in Asia. We are part of a global community that spans the globe and all cultural, racial, ethnic, socio-economic categories.
I have a friend that talks about the Communion table being really long and really wide. The Lord's Table is so wide that it reaches all the way around the world to include our global brothers and sister in Africa and Asia, in the Middle East and in Europe, in South America and Australia.

And it's also so long that it reaches way back through the generations to include the saints that have gone before: the ones we can remember personally, the ones we never knew. And when we come to the table, we are here primarily to REMEMBER Jesus Christ.

- To remember his life and his death and his resurrection.
- To remember the parables he told.
- To remember the way he loved.
- To remember how he taught us to pray for our enemies and welcome everyone into God’s embrace.

At this table we remember that God's love for us is so BIG and so WIDE and so DEEP that God chose to take on human form to show us how to live and how to love. At the Lord's Table we remember that God's love for us is so BIG and so WIDE and so DEEP that Jesus chose to die on a cross as the ultimate sign of God's love for us. And God's love and God's power are so BIG and so WIDE and so DEEP that Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death so that we would never be separated from God's loving presence.

I want to circle back to the person that you thought of who influenced your faith. Think about what a gift that person was to you. And the pressing question before us is who are we mentoring? Who are we teaching the faith to? As in, who are you, personally teaching the faith to?

For this Christian faith only works when we pass it on to others. That's why the church has always placed significant value in teaching the faith. It's why Christian Education and Mission have always been the hallmark of the Presbyterian Church. The importance of passing on the faith is why we put so much emphasis on teaching the faith to our children and youth through Sunday school and worship and ma-I and confirmation and youth groups. It's why our WeekDay school is so important - teaching the Love of God to the littlest among us.

Teaching the faith to others is passing along the gift that we have received from those who have taught us. It's a big part of what it means to be a community of faith.

The Apostle Paul spent his life teaching and encouraging others. Timothy mentored and taught others. Jesus mentored and taught the disciples, and then the disciples mentored and taught others. That's how the church works.
So what about you?
   Who are you **mentoring these days**?
   Who are you teaching these days?
   How is your faith, our faith, being passed on to others?

Sisters and Brothers, in the spirit of 2nd Timothy: I remind us all to **stoke the fire of faith** that is within each of us, and to **pass on the faith**, to make sure this **treasure of faith is taught and shown and spread**.\(^{iv}\)

May it be so. Amen.

\(^{i}\) Will Willimon, *Indebted Faith* article, found on TheHardestQuestion, on Spark House @ http://thq.wearesparkhouse.org/featured/indebted-faith/

\(^{ii}\) BMPC has been partnered with Eben-Ezer Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, Guatemala for over 22 years, through a Presbytery-wide partnerships between Presbytery of Western NC and Presbytery of Suchitepequez in Guatemala.

\(^{iii}\) The Rev Buz Wilcoxon (PCUSA pastor of Spring Hill Presbyterian Church in Mobile AL) is in my clergy group, and he was the first to share this long and wide Communion table image with me.

\(^{iv}\) This is an adaption, translation, and interpretation of selected verses from 2 Timothy chapter 1: verses 6 (“rekindle the gift of God that is within you”), 13, and 14 (“guard the good treasure entrusted to you”).