

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,
by Pastor David Fischler, on Sunday, September 28, 2014**

RAISING THE FAMILY RIGHT

2 Timothy 3:10-17

Last weekend if you weren't there, I'm afraid you missed a good presentation. You really did. Jim Byrne, who is the youth pastor at the Falls Church Anglican Church, came and spoke to us about faith that sticks for an inter-generational church. I was so impressed by his presentation that, since I knew there were a good number of folks who weren't there last week, I thought I would give it myself. I brought it with me this morning. I can get to most of this between now and Tuesday. Anybody going to stick around for that? No, I didn't think so.

So, since I can't get to the whole thing I thought I would bring to you one part of what he shared with us that I think is of tremendous importance, not only for each of us personally or for Faith Church. In fact, this is a message for the church throughout the world. And I have to say there are parts of the church in various parts of the world that have not forgotten this. The church in America, unfortunately, all too often has, and it's in part because we followed the way of the world. The way of the world starting at least in the early 20th century was to segregate people by age. You had children over here and you had youth over here and you had adults over here. If you put them in separate places and you dealt with them differently and under different circumstances then supposedly everyone would learn better. Unfortunately, the experience of the last 50, 75, even 100 years belies that and in fact demonstrates that in fact what Jim calls the "inter-generational church" is in fact much closer, in fact I think it is the way that God intended the church to be. The barriers dropped, the segregation behind us, and instead, what we sought to do last weekend and what we're seeking to do now here at Faith is to re-integrate the church family. We're seeking to bring the church family of all ages and genders and circumstances of life back together again.

What I'd like to do today is take a look at this idea through a very specific lens that I think was given to us at least in part in order to illustrate this idea. And that is the relationship between Paul and Timothy. You've heard of them both. Paul, you know. Paul became a Christian on the Damascus Road. He had been a persecutor of the church. He grew up very, very faithful to the ways of Judaism. His teacher was one of the most famous men in Jewish history, the most famous teachers. And yet he became a Christian on the Damascus Road because he was confronted by Christ Himself.

After that, interestingly enough, there was a period of time in which Paul set himself apart. He did not immediately jump into the task that we know so much about of planting churches and evangelizing and making disciples. Instead, he drew himself apart and for several years he spent time in what's now Arabia under the tutelage of other disciples of Jesus who taught him what this was all about, who taught him the life of Jesus and Jesus' own teaching and who helped him as he developed the theology that so much comes through in his letters. He also in the course of that time, obviously, drew himself apart

from everyone in prayer and in study, listening to the Holy Spirit. So he combined those two things, listening directly to God, listening to God's people and together became the man that we refer to as the greatest of the apostles.

After that, of course, he planted multiple churches. In each place he made disciples who could then be put in charge of those church plants. And he became a mentor to a number of men who became evangelists and disciple-makers in their own right. One of those was Titus, to whom Paul wrote a letter that found its way into the New Testament by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Two other letters were to a man named Timothy, who was also one of those disciples. But Timothy is less well-known than Paul, so let me tell you a little bit about him.

He was born in the Roman Empire's district of Lyconia, in Turkey. It's a district that's within various other jurisdictions like Cappadocia and Galatia. It kind of switched jurisdictions over time. It's in modern Turkey. He was born there. His father is unknown, except that he was a Gentile and he was likely a man who died very young or very early in Timothy's life. We suspect that because his name is not known and because other than one passing reference he never appears. So it's likely that Timothy was either an infant or a young child when his father died and as a result he was raised by his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, both of whom were Christians who were well-known to Paul. 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 5 says this: "I have been 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." So these two women were known to Paul and were well-known enough to him so that he could speak of their faith. For all we know, we do not know otherwise, he might have been the channel through whom the Spirit worked to bring them to Christ. They not only raised Timothy in terms of parenting, they also raised him as spiritual parents as well. 2 Timothy 3:15, part of the passage that we read earlier, indicates that Timothy had been taught the Scripture since he was very young. Verse 15 says, "and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures." He doesn't mean that Timothy was born knowing the Old Testament, which is what the Scriptures would have been at that time. What Paul means is that he was taught them and that he came to know them and may well have memorized significant portions of the Old Testament, which was a common practice in the day when not everyone had access to the printed Word. He was raised from infancy with the Word of God by godly parents. As a matter of fact, it would seem, at least on the basis of the New Testament evidence, that he was one of the first Christians about whom that could be said. One of the first Christians about whom it could be said that he didn't become a Christian as an adult, but rather was raised as one, as what reformed theology would call a "covenant child." A child who is raised as part of the elect of God right from the beginning by virtue of being a child of Christian parents or, in this case a Christian mother and grandmother.

There were great things expected of Timothy. It was prophesied that he would become an evangelist in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 15. Paul specifically says, "Do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you." We're not given a lot of detail about what might have happened.

One reconstruction of that – admittedly there’s some speculation involved in this – might be that when Timothy grew to whatever age was common for baptism at that point – infants were baptized, but he might not have been – but at some point he was baptized and the elders of the church where he was would’ve laid hands on him and at that point in the course of having those hands laid on him, someone prophesied regarding the spiritual gifts that God was going to give him, gifts that would make him an evangelist and a missionary and a disciple-maker in his own right.

So this is a young man of whom great things were expected in the realm of the kingdom of God. And as a young adult he became Paul’s trusted companion in missions. He accompanied Paul to probably hundreds of places, among those that are mentioned specifically in Scripture are Philippi in northern Greece, Berea in Asia Minor, Athens and Corinth in Greece. He played a significant role in both of Paul’s later missionary journeys, the second and third missionary journeys. He’s mentioned seven times in the Book of Acts and fourteen times all together in Paul’s letters to the churches. So, exclude the two letters that are sent specifically to him, even beyond that he is mentioned fourteen times by Paul. Then, of course, he wrote two of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament to him. So this is an important person. He’s not someone that we know a lot about, but we know that he was in the middle of some momentous events that were going on in the life of the early church as it spread from its original home in the Holy Land out into Asia Minor and into Europe and beyond.

So that’s Paul and it’s Timothy. And in this chapter, the third chapter of 2 Timothy, Paul talks about the relationship between the two of them. He shows us a relationship that is based on openness, on honesty and on sharing of their lives. Take a look at this passage and you’ll see that Paul recounts for Timothy some of what his young friend has seen in him. “You, however, know all about my teaching.” He learned the deep things of the Gospel from the master. I have no doubt that Eunice and Lois went as far as they could in teaching him the Scripture, in explaining the Gospel, enabling him to understand some of the implications of the Gospel, working out how to live as a Christian disciple, but for Timothy to have sat at the feet of the apostle Paul, can you imagine that? Think about this: Many of you, maybe even most of you, grew up in Christian homes and you learned from your parents. I hope you did. You learned the Bible from them, they read it to you, you read it with them, you asked questions, they gave answers. But can you imagine after having done that with your parents the apostle Paul came to you and said, “I want to teach you a few things.” You think you would have said yes to that offer? How about if I say that? No. But if *Paul* said that, it would be something we all would have jumped at in a minute.

So here is Timothy, in a one-on-one teaching situation with Paul. Think about that for just a second. When we have a Sunday School class or a fellowship group that only has one student in it, what’s our response to that? Well, this is a failure. God obviously doesn’t want this to happen. This isn’t how it works. You have to have lots of kids or even lots of adults. You can’t have just one person and one teacher. That’s just not the way it’s done. Is it? In fact, as my wife will tell you from her years of dealing with children and will tell you at the drop of a hat, the opportunity for you as an adult to have

time one-on-one with one child is a gift from God and Heaven help you if you blow it. Heaven help you if you denigrate it. Heaven help you if you don't take advantage of a gift that God has given to enable you as an adult to have this person's undivided attention. That's what Timothy had. That's how he learned. Not in a class with thirty other kids his age. He learned one-on-one with Paul. "You know all about my teaching, my way of life." He knows how Paul lived. He didn't just see him for an hour on Sunday morning up front. He was in his home. He went with him from place to place. He shared his experiences and he saw how Paul responded to what went on around him. He saw how Paul answered question. He saw how Paul dealt with difficult ethical conundrums. He saw how Paul dealt with just the day-to-day aspect of living as a disciple. I think we've all probably heard it said that surveys have been done of Christians for twenty, thirty, forty years about the way that they live and the attitudes that they have towards the world and the incredible thing is that for the majority of people who call themselves Christians there is no difference in the way that they view the world or in the way that they live day-to-day. There is no way for anyone to tell – not by quirky habits or strange ways of dressing – but in the way that they live, the language that they use, the decisions that they make, the things that are important to them. There is no way for the world to discern that they're actually Christians. There's something wrong with a life that's lived in such a way that allows you to be anonymous on the streets.

Paul didn't live that way. We all know that. This is a man who suffered repeatedly from the slings and arrows of a world that knew very well what he was and what he stood for, and didn't like it much. Timothy saw that on a daily basis and in seeing that he learned what a Christian looks like and how a Christian lives. "So you know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose." He knew why Paul did what he did. There was no mystery here. He knew what motivated Paul. He knew what the reasons were, why he made the decisions that he made, he knew what kind of mission Paul had. He saw that and if he didn't see it, if he didn't know, he asked. He had the opportunity to say, "Paul, why are you going to Athens rather than to Corinth?" or "Why did you just give that man more change from his money than he just paid you for a tent than he should have gotten?" Or "Paul, why is it that you didn't have anything to eat today and yet you had bread that you gave to a perfect stranger that you saw on the street? Why did you do that?" And Paul would tell him. So Timothy saw his teaching, he saw his way of life, he saw his purpose, he saw his faith, his patience, his love, his endurance.

I suppose it is possible that Paul just mentioned those things at random, but I suspect not. Anyone recognize where those four things all come from? They all come from his list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians. He doesn't mention all nine of the fruits that he speaks of in Galatians, but he does mention faith and patience and love and endurance (or perseverance). Another way to put this is, Timothy saw the Holy Spirit bearing His fruit through Paul. He saw Paul's trust in God. He saw his self-sacrificing love for others. He saw his patience in dealing with difficult situations. He saw his endurance amid persecution. And if you go to Galatians 5 you'll see the rest of the list of the fruit of the Spirit, I have no doubt that you could plug those in as well. All of those things were seen by Timothy in Paul's life, in Paul's teaching, in Paul's work. Then, in verse 11, he goes on to say, "You know all about my persecutions, sufferings, what kind of things

happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, and in Lystra. You saw it. You saw, Timothy, that just because I'm doing the Lord's work, life is not a bed of roses. You saw how the world responds and (here's the really important part) how I responded." Timothy saw how Paul responded when he was shipwrecked, when he was beaten, when he was imprisoned, when he was threatened with death, when he was set upon by a mob, when he was stoned. Timothy saw all of that, maybe even went through a lot of that with him. He saw how Paul responded to all of that. He saw the persecution Paul endured and in the process he found out how it is that a Christian responds when things do not go the way we like them to go.

Has anyone here ever been disappointed by life? Anyone? I know this is the wealthiest area in the country but surely there are some disappointments that you've experienced. We've got one hand up. "I'm eleven and I'm as cynical as they get." Right, John? We've all been disappointed by life, we've all seen things that haven't worked out the way that we thought they were going to. Some of us may have even experienced some degree of persecution from family or from friends or from co-workers or from fellow students and we know that that was something that Christ said we were going to experience. So the question is, how do we respond to it? Timothy saw how Paul responded to it. Paul then calls on Timothy to remember all of this and to imitate Paul in his own discipleship and ministry. "As for you (verse 14), continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. What you've seen in me and learned from me, continue in that. Why? Because on some abstract level it's right? There is that, because it's true. But more importantly because you know those from whom you learned it." At that point, note, he uses the plural. So he's talking about himself, he's talking about the other men with whom Timothy and Paul traveled, people like Luke or Titus or Barnabas or John Mark or any of a number of others. "You've seen it in them, too. You've seen it in your mother and your grandmother. You've learned from them as well. Continue in what you have learned and in what you know is right because you've got good witnesses. Because you've got people whom you trust, people whom you love and who you know love you who have imparted this to you. Continue in what you've learned."

It's interesting, isn't it, that we live in a day where what people want more than anything else is to be original. It was once found that the word "new" is one of the best words to use in advertising. Have you ever heard an advertisement that came on and said, "This is the oldest stuff on the market! This is what you want!"? No, you don't hear that. You hear, "This is new! It's fresh! It's different! It's exciting!" And Paul says you don't want that. The fact of the matter is that everyone in the course of the last 2,000 years of Christian history who has tried to be original in their thinking or their acting has gotten in trouble. And the reason for that is simple. It's because we have been given a pattern, a pattern of thought and a pattern of action by our Lord. And it is from Him that we receive it, in Him that we continue in it. We're not asked to be original thinkers and to come along and blaze a new path. He's already blazed the path. We're only called to walk it. This goes for the manner of life stuff as well, not just thinking, not just theology. The stuff that Paul mentions in verses 10 and 11: "My way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, endurance, persecutions, sufferings." That's the kind of stuff that Timothy is to continue in and to continue in it because he knows from whom he has gotten it.

Now you can see why I went to this passage to talk about the inter-generational church. We've got the older, experienced man in Paul. We've got the young man with great gifts in Timothy. And what I've just done is that I've described our congregation. We have older – and when I say older, I don't necessarily mean chronologically – I'm only 26 and yet.... We've got people here in their late 20s, in their 30s, who have a depth of wisdom and Christian understanding that lots of people in their 60s and 70s couldn't even begin to approach. So it's not a question of chronological age necessarily. It's a question of spiritual maturity. We've got dozens and dozens of spiritually mature people here, people whose grasp on the truth of the Gospel, their understanding of it, their manner of living is something that anyone who bears the name of Christ should want to emulate.

And we've got young people with gifts. We've got young people here who have gifts from God, whether natural abilities or spiritual gifts, that could turn things upside down in this church, in this city, in this region, in this country. We've got those here. We've got both of them. But, if we insist on segregating them, the young will never develop their gifts, never come to a right understanding of what God's called them to, and will stumble about in the world and gradually drift away thinking, "I've missed something but I don't have any idea what it is, so I guess I'll just eat, drink and be merry." If we segregate them we lose them. And that's what the research that's been done on young adults and teenagers has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt. We are losing young people. What we have failed to take into account is why we're losing them. It's not just because the culture's against us. The culture has always been against us in one way or another. It's not just because there are temptations out there that just drag them in. There have always been temptations. What we're seeing now, and what we've seen for many years is the church trying to put them in their own little corner where they can do their own thing and have their own fun and not bother us. And when I say "bother" I don't just mean annoy, I mean we can hand them over to Mike Bittenbender and our youth leaders and they'll take care of it. We don't have to worry about it. Well, friends, it's not good enough. If we care about our children, if we care about the next generation of the church, if we care about what God has called us to as disciple-makers, we are called to care. And to do.

Here's about as simple a slide as you'll ever see (5 – 1). And I can tell you it's not the odds of the Nats winning the World Series. Those are much higher. Five to one is what Jim Byrne talked about last weekend. And what he said was, "If you want to keep children in the church, if you want to see them grow in Christ, if you want to see them live lives that honor God, you as adults have to put yourself into their lives. See if you can put yourself into their lives in a ratio of five to one. I don't mean five hours of yours to one hour of theirs. I mean five of you to each one of them.

So we'll take John, right in front, my little cynic. Eleven years old and he's already disappointed by life. You know we can turn that around. We can help him deal with those disappointments. We can teach him how to deal with those disappointments so that when he's grown up and moved to California and started his own tech company he'll know how to do it as a Christian. Well, if it's his parents, that's great. That's where it

starts. They're primary. But it can't be just his parents. It's got to be his Sunday School teacher. And not just for an hour on Sunday morning, but through the week. It's got to be his youth director. It's got to be the other youth leaders. It's got to be Terri Schergen and Henry Hoyle who don't normally have anything to do with him. They wouldn't even know who he was if I had not introduced his smiling face to them right here, right now. John, would you stand up? Turn around so Terri and Henry see you. He is a really good kid. Thank you, John. I picked Terri and Henry out of a hat but it could be any of us.

Jim's point, and I think it's something Paul would endorse whole-heartedly, is that we have a responsibility here to those whom God has placed in our hands. He has given us stewardship over the lives of children from infancy until we're gone. Not till they get to sixth grade, not till they get to be seniors in high school, not when they graduate from college, but when we're gone. When John is 40, I hope there are adults in this congregation – at that point, fellow adults – who he can look to and say, "You know you helped shape my life when I was 11 and 13 and 18, and I have a question for you now." And who knows, maybe 29 years from now you'll go to him because he's been formed in such a way that now he's the Paul and the rest of us can be Timothy's.

I know we have children up to sixth grade out in children's church. Would everyone else here who is currently in school between sixth grade and senior year in high school please stand? Look around, folks. Every single one of them is named Timothy. You may be seated. Let's pray.