

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, October 14, 2007
Rev. John Tapscott

“REKINDLE THE GIFT OF GOD”

2 Timothy 1:6

Many preachers have used this story. A man was telling a friend that he could be a good Christian apart from the church. The wise friend said nothing but went to the coal fire behind them, took out a red-hot coal and set it on the hearth. Soon the coal lost its glow and grew cold. Then he put it back in the fire where it became hot and glowing again. The wise man still said nothing. But his friend got the point . A Christian out of fellowship with other Christians is like a coal out of fire.

Now we have to accept that today’s life-styles and work schedules often make week-by-week church attendance impossible. But I can tell you that it’s an encouragement to me every time you’re here. It’s an encouragement to the rest of the congregation and of course, it’s an encouragement to people who may be visiting to see a full and vibrant church. But though the times and the patterns of church attendance have changed in many ways, the point still stands. It is difficult to maintain, let alone grow in your Christian faith, apart from the fellowship of other Christians, whether that’s in worship or in a small group for study or fellowship or service. As the writer to the Hebrews says, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another....” Martin Luther, the church reformer wrote, “At home in my house there is no warmth or vigour in me, but in church when a multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and breaks its way through.”

These thoughts are not the focus of my sermon today, but they came to mind as I reflected on the text - 2 Timothy 1:6, “Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” Paul called Timothy his son in the faith. Paul had taken Timothy on missionary trips. Indeed, it seems Paul had set Timothy apart to ministry with the laying on of hands in some kind of ordination ceremony. And now from a Roman prison Paul wrote a letter to encourage Timothy. Paul knew that Timothy had a sincere faith, but he also knew that Timothy was sometimes timid in sharing his faith and testifying to the Lord. So Paul wrote to him, “Hence 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 timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord,

nor of me, his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God.”

Today we face many of the same temptations and pressures that Timothy faced. We may have a sincere faith but feel timid about testifying to it. We are sometimes ashamed to say that we are Christian. It’s not just an individual problem. It’s a problem for the church. In the face of secular unbelief, the church often retreats and gives too much ground. Its’ witness to the Gospel becomes muted. So Paul’s words are for the church and for individual Christians. “Stir up the gift of God that is within you.”

Now the gift that God gave to Timothy and to the church and to each one of us is the Holy Spirit. Each of us received the Holy Spirit when we confessed Christ before many witnesses and hands were laid on us. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control. God’s Spirit empowers us to testify to our lord, even suffer for the Gospel if need be, and to do it with love and self-control. And the latter two are vital, for boldness without love or self-control undermines our witness to Christ. God forgive me. Many times I’ve been ashamed of the Gospel or silent about who I am. Often my words and actions have lacked love and self-control. So I feel the need, and the whole church has a need to “rekindle the gift of God that is within us; not a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control. How then can we rekindle and stir into flame the gift of God that is within us? How can we get fired up about our faith again?

First, by remembering our spiritual heritage. Paul says to Timothy, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice...” (V. 5)

We stand in a long Christian heritage that began with Christ and the apostles, and includes martyrs, saints, and ordinary believing and serving Christians, like Lois and Eunice. Some of us like Timothy were lucky enough to grow up in a faithful household and first heard the story of Jesus on our mother’s knee. We need to remember the faith of our fathers, and our mothers, too and how that faith gave them direction and hope.

Now critics always point out the lamentable lapses in Christian history, but in fact the church has had, and continues to have, a huge impact for good in the world. We need not be ashamed of the tradition in which we stand. From Jesus and the first followers, Christianity has grown so that over 2 billion people now claim the name of Christ. And how do the critics explain that?

The scholar Dinesh D’Souza of Stanford University has written a new book called, “What’s So Great About Christianity?” It’s an answer to the strident atheists who have captured public attention over the past few years. And he makes these points. 1) Christianity

is the main foundation of Western civilization, the root of our most cherished values. 2) The latest discoveries of modern science support the Christian claim that there is a divine being who created the universe. 3) Darwin's theory of evolution, far from undermining the evidence for divine design, actually strengthens it. 4) There is nothing in science that makes miracles impossible. 5) It is reasonable to have faith. 6) Atheism, not religion, is responsible for the mass murders of history. 7) Atheism is supported not by reason but is a way of cowardly moral escapism. And the Christianity D'Souza defends is not fundamentalism or liberalism, both of which can easily be set up as straw men and attacked. Instead, he's speaking of orthodox Christianity, the solid ground of Christian belief shared by both Protestants and Catholics.

Let us remember our rich spiritual heritage, or in a Biblical phrase, "let us remember the rock from which we were hewn." That will help rekindle the gift of God within us, the spirit of power and love and self-control.

Another way to rekindle God's gift within us is to reflect on the greatness of the Gospel. Paul writes in verses 9 and 10, "God....saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works, but in virtue of his own purpose and grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

Critics sometimes accuse Christians of wishful thinking, of having unsupported beliefs. But just think of what some people believe, without any supporting evidence at all.

Recently on the MSN/Sympatico homepage (and not The National Enquirer) I read an article about the actor Tom Cruise, who is a devout follower of Scientology. Tom Cruise believes that the evil intergalactic ruler Xenu will soon attack earth, so he's built a ten million dollar bunker under his Colorado mansion. The bunker has a high-tech air-purifying system so that Tom and his family can survive for years. Scientology's guru L. Ron Hubbard claimed alien beings were sent to earth ages ago by Xenu who then destroyed the aliens with hydrogen bombs in a volcano. The aliens' souls attached themselves to chosen humans, known as thetans, who will one day be saved. And Tom Cruise is the chosen one who spreads the word of this faith. Friends, make no mistake. When people turn from solid Biblical faith, they don't believe in nothing, they believe anything.

How much more comforting and hopeful is the orthodox Christian Gospel, as proclaimed in the Apostles' Creed, which we say together every Communion Sunday. The Christian Gospel is a great and wonderful and powerful story. It is the story of how our holy and merciful God stooped not to condemn but to save this sin-stained world. It proclaims that in love God sent his only Son to share our human nature, to live a life without sin, to teach

God's truth, to perform mighty works, to bear our sins and griefs in death on the Cross, and to rise again, abolishing death and bringing life and immortality to light. Before ascending to heaven Christ showed himself alive to his followers over forty days with many convincing proofs. And he has send the Holy Spirit from heaven to dwell with the church and within us, to help and empower us, until that Day he comes again as Judge and King to complete God's new heaven and new earth.

And even now Christ comes by the power of the Holy Spirit to every willing and believing heart. He comes to heal our wounded souls, to forgive our sin and give us a fresh start, to be light in the world's darkness, to comfort those who mourn, to bear our burdens, to give us the hope an reality of eternal life. Christianity appeals to heart and mind and meets our deepest human needs. It is a faith which is undergirded by many convincing proofs. Christianity is a glorious, revolutionary, saving faith. It is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Rekindle the gift of God within you by reflecting on the greatness of the Christian Gospel.

Finally, we rekindle the gift of God's Spirit within us through our personal relationship with Christ. Paul says in verse 12, "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed..."

Christian faith at is best is not just knowing about Christ but knowing Him. How you enter into this relationship with Chris is no mystery. It comes from personal acceptance of Christ as your Saviour and Lord, from walking and talking with him as you would a good friend. And then here's what happens. It's happened to me. Somewhere along life's road, perhaps in a crisis or perhaps when the skies are sunny, Christ makes himself real to you. He comes and convinces you of his presence and power. You know you are held by arms of love that will never let you go. You have a testimony to share; a story to tell. You know the One in whom you believe. Put all your trust in Christ. Renew your commitment o him as your Saviour and Lord. Lean on Him. Let Him be Your guide. And when God's people do that, God's gift - the spirit of power and love and self-control is rekindled in us and in the church. Once again we become fired up, enthusiastic witnesses to this wonderful faith we profess.