

Sunday Reflection by Rev. Shannon DeLaureal 19th July 2020

2 Timothy 2:8-13 and 4:6-8

Pass It On!

This past week a milestone has been reached in the manse family. Our son Brennan finished primary school . . . not just for summer break, but forever! He completed Year 6 and will be moving on to secondary school in September. As parents, we are so proud of all the learning and work he's done thus far. We celebrate with him the completion of his primary school career. But we are also sad that this phase is over. He's not our little boy anymore. He's grown into a preteen, acting more like a teenager each day exerting his independence in word and action! Looking toward September, we don't fully know what secondary school will be like, but the school is doing a brilliant job of preparing the parents and future Year 7's of what to expect through their online communications and in-school presentations.



This past week all Year 6's in Brennan's school were instructed to write a letter to the current Year 5's giving them advice on what to expect and words of wisdom for next year. In a sense they were passing on the baton like a person would if running a relay race. Year 6's have now finished the race and it's time for the Year 5's to step forward and continue the race. The same would be true in any other time of big transition in one's educational career.

But what I have found very encouraging is that the Year 6 teachers wanted the pupils to share their wisdom and experience with those coming after them. This practice of passing on wisdom helps a young person to think of someone besides themselves and think of what they wish they had known before entering Year 6. What an important life skill this is and it will benefit many throughout a lifetime.

In our New Testament reading today I see the Apostle Paul passing on the baton to Timothy, his co-worker in spreading the Gospel. Writing this letter while imprisoned during the reign of Emperor Nero, shackled in chains and possibly in a cold dungeon, Paul acknowledged that his ministry and life were coming to an end. He wrote "the time has come for my departure." (2 Tim. 4:6) He compared his approaching death as a drink offering which would have been a priestly tradition of pouring out wine around the base of the altar during an offering to the Lord. (Numbers 15:1-12). For Paul, he was pouring out his life as an offering to Christ.

Before he died, Paul decided to encourage Timothy and all others in their endurance to remain firm in the Gospel, even under persecution, for the sake of receiving salvation. He anticipated that Christ's return was imminent. Those who followed Christ would be rewarded by Christ himself even if they suffered in this present life. Their earthly lives would have been spent sharing God's love, mercy and forgiveness, confronting injustice and heresy, and teaching doctrine so that others could come to know him. Even if the followers of Christ were killed for these things, they would receive eternal glory. I trust this motivated Paul for his own

30 years of ministry while he endured countless hardships, setbacks, and abandonment by so-called believers, waiting for Christ to return.

Our passage today concludes with some well-known and well-loved words that we often hear at funerals of faithful members of the church. Paul wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day --- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

I can't imagine how Paul felt as he anticipated his upcoming death, but I would think penning these words might have brought him some satisfaction as he reflected on all that had been done to pass on the Christian faith to others and to oversee these early Christian communities. A crown of righteousness given by the Lord is quite an inspirational reward . . . something to strive for and to work towards with God's help, especially in the midst of hardship. Charles Wesley wrote about this reward in his hymn "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." In the final verse he writes: ". . . changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise!"

For nearly 2000 years the Church has been passing on the faith to the next generation all over the world, through prayer, words and action! And we, the Church of the 21st century, are continuing this mission through printed resources, in person with social distancing and online as we persevere in finding new ways of connecting and practicing the faith during this global pandemic. I am proud of what our circuit has been offering for worship for the last several months since our church buildings have closed. We are reaching more people now online than when we only offered in-person worship on Sunday's. As exciting as this is, we must remember that sharing the faith isn't only about numbers. It's also about relationships that provide nurture and encouragement in the faith.

Can you name a person or several people who have encouraged you in your faith journey and perhaps even do to this day? I don't think it matters how long we've been a Christian, we still need support. Thank God for them and the blessings of their friendship. Now is the time to pass that on! Have a think: is there anyone you could encourage in the faith? Is there an individual or a certain group of people that keep coming to mind? If so, perhaps God is trying to get your attention. As local churches and as the circuit, are there creative ways we can share Christ's love in our communities as folks re-enter society as lockdown restrictions continue to ease? At times, sharing the faith has more to do with being rather than doing. It's about offering friendship and helping people discern the presence of our loving God in their lives which brings about great hope.

May we be encouraged that even in the midst of our current, trying circumstances, faith in Christ is being passed on in various ways, new and old. May we be inspired to be creative in sharing his life-giving message for all. When our time comes, may we find ourselves looking back upon our life's journey of faith and echoing the words of Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness . . ." Amen.



