

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

April 23, 2017

“Grandma’s Legacy”

All in the Family, part #1

2nd Timothy 1:1-14

Would you do me a favor this morning? Turn to your neighbor and tell them, “I’m glad you’re here.” Worshipping God is a job for the entire community, not just one or two of us. We need to remind ourselves that we are not alone. When you choose to give up your precious time to be present in this gathering, you are giving a gift to all of us, including me. But more importantly, you are offering a holy and pleasing sacrifice to God.

This is a place where we expect to encounter God, who restores us and transforms us. So I invite you to pray with me now as we discover what God’s word says to us. Let’s pray.

O God, our Guide and Guardian, you have led us apart from a busy world into the quiet of your house. Grant us grace to worship you in Spirit and in truth, to the comfort of our souls and the upbuilding of every good purpose and holy desire. Enable us to do more perfectly the work to which you have called us that we may not fear the coming of night, when we shall resign into your hands the tasks which you have committed to us. So may we worship you not with our lips at this hour, but in word and deed all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (UMC Book of Worship 460)

This Sunday I am beginning a six week series I am calling “All in the Family.” No, we will NOT be watching reruns of Archie Bunker. (Are you surprised I knew that show?) What I will do is highlight six biblical examples of godly men and

women in families: a grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, daughter, and son. Today I want to talk about grandmothers.

This is “Cow,” a special toy from my childhood, the only “stuffy” that I have left. I will give you one guess who knitted this for me. My Grandma Falker. My grandparents were dairy farmers in southeast Michigan, and obviously this present was both for my comfort as a child and a reminder of the legacy of my family.

I have a lot of great memories of my grandmother, such as picking blueberries and spending time on the farm. Grandma Falker was a pretty serious lady. She was a school teacher, and she ran the business side of the farm for my grandpa. However, there were some times when she unintentionally caused some rather humorous situations. Once, she fell ill, literally – she had a fainting spell at our home and hit her head. Our family doctor was on call at the ER, and when he saw “Mrs. Falker” on the medical chart, he thought it was my mom. He was quite shocked to see a lady 30 years older sitting in the hospital bed! His next shock was to discover that Grandma was blind in one eye. When my own parents arrived, he told them gravely – “I’m sorry, but Mrs. Falker has severely injured her eye. I’m afraid she’ll never see out of it again.” My mom actually burst out laughing. “She’s never seen out of that eye. A midwife damaged it when she was born.”

The most important thing I know about my grandma is that she always took us with her to the Lutheran Church. I didn’t understand much of the worship – I only remember that the liturgy was odd, I didn’t know all the songs and prayers, and I wasn’t technically allowed to receive communion, but I did anyway, because

my cousins were Lutheran and I wanted to go up with them. The legacy that my grandmother left me was one of Christian faith.

I am hoping that many of you here also have great memories of your grandmothers. Maybe they sent you gifts for your birthday. Maybe you remember taking vacations with them. Maybe you remember attending church with them, going to Easter Sunday or Christmas Eve services with them.

The point I wish to make this morning is that my grandmother left a legacy for me, and her choices have impacted my life two generations later. Did your grandmother also leave you a legacy? Even better, if you are currently a grandmother, and many of you are, what faith legacy are you leaving your grandchildren?

The biblical example I lift up to you this morning is a grandmother named Lois. All we know is that she was a Jewish Christian in the 1st century, and she had a daughter named Eunice and a grandson named Timothy. That's all the Bible tells us. But that connection to Timothy is significant and it is the reason I chose to speak about her today.

Paul writes these words in the 2nd letter to Timothy, chapter 1, verse 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." Clearly, Paul and Timothy were very close. Paul called Timothy "his son," and talked about Timothy's tears. Paul and Timothy were homesick for each other. Have you ever cried when you left your grandparents' home, or when your mother or father went away? Then you can understand Paul's and Timothy's sorrow.

But Paul does not just write a sappy, tear-stained letter. He is writing to encourage Timothy. After greeting Timothy in Christ's name, and reminding

Timothy of his constant prayers, Paul brings up the connection of faith that runs in Timothy's family, notably, in the matriarchs.

Now, Acts 16:1 tells us that Timothy's mother was Jewish and "a believer," but his father was a Greek. This is significant and surprising. Timothy did not follow the religion that his father presumably followed. He had his mother's faith, which we are told originated in his grandmother. Wouldn't it seem much more likely that a boy would want to emulate his father? Most sources that I have encountered state that active faith practice is closely tied with a boy's relationship to his father. If a father worships God with his family, the children are significantly more likely to practice the same faith. This was especially true in Paul and Timothy's world.

So why does Paul mention Lois and Eunice? Before the verse where the ladies are mentioned, Paul mentions his own ancestors "who also served God." I believe that Paul is addressing a need in Timothy's life. Timothy might have felt discouraged because he didn't have a long list of ancestors who worshiped God, either as Jews or Christians, like Paul did. But Paul is saying, "This is not just your faith alone, Timothy. It exists in your mother and it started in your grandmother. You are part of a legacy."

As the letter continues, Paul offers all sorts of encouragement to Timothy: "Fan into flame the gift of God." (Verse 6) "Don't be timid." (Verse 7) "Don't be ashamed," and, "Join with me in the suffering for the gospel." (Verse 8)

Essentially, Paul is saying, "Follow my example." He is telling Timothy, "You can do it! Your grandma was faithful, your mom was faithful, and you will be, too!" What a great message of encouragement.

I know I want encouragement. It was nice to hear expressions of gratitude yesterday after I officiated Bud Holland's funeral. It was great to see his family, including his granddaughters, who are all faithful Christians as well. There is a family legacy worth celebrating.

But there is an ache that I have heard many of you express. I have had grandparents, specifically grandmothers, say, "Pastor, I wish my son's family, my daughter's family, would attend church, but they have decided not to." Or, "I wish my grandchildren knew Jesus, but they have had little exposure to faith." These grandmas long for a legacy. And to be honest, although I am speaking primarily to grandparents in the room, this message applies to everyone. Everyone has someone in their life who doesn't know Jesus. Everyone knows someone who needs encouragement and needs to hear the gospel.

I am asking you to make a choice today. If you long for your children, or your grandchildren, or your friends...if you long for them to be a part of God's kingdom, you need to choose between two options. Option "A" is: Do nothing. Don't confront them. Don't talk to them about religion. Just be quiet, keep the peace, and pray that they will come around. That's your first option.

Hear the compassion in my voice as I say this. Don't make that choice. It will eat you up inside. Instead, take option "B". Be the Church to them. Let me give you three practical ways to do this.

Number one: Pray for your family and friends, constantly. This is what Paul did. Paul prayed for Timothy, constantly. And I'm sure Lois prayed, too. I know many of you do this for your families, and I want to be the voice of encouragement to you today. Don't stop praying! Whether you're a

grandmother or not, don't give up! Paul said it to Timothy, and I am saying it to you. Don't stop praying.

Number two: Be the voice of encouragement to them. We live in a world where we are constantly bombarded by criticism and sarcasm. So let's commit to speaking words of life. Paul ordained Timothy, which means he commissioned him for special purpose. What purpose does God have for your children and grandchildren? Have you told them about it? Because, honestly, if they think that their purpose is to sit in a pew for one hour a week, they are not going to pursue it. But if you tell them their purpose is to experience the love of God, to heal the world, to serve, and to tell the most amazing story ever...that sounds a lot more exciting. That is a purpose I can claim.

Number three: Don't stop inviting. Don't stop asking, "Will you come with me?" Offer to take them out to lunch afterwards. It will work! Even if they won't come to worship, don't stop telling them God's story. God actually commands us to do this in Deuteronomy 6:7. Talk about these things with your children and your grandchildren. Pray. Encourage. Invite.

Our quest to leave a legacy of faith in their lives comes down to a battle with discomfort. I was told recently, "In a cage match between change and comfort, comfort always wins." What that means is, for change to happen, it must become more comfortable than the alternative. It is uncomfortable to talk with someone about Jesus when they are not interested. It is uncomfortable to pray in front of people who don't. I know. I experience that same discomfort. But how comfortable are we knowing what is at stake in their lives? How comfortable are we consigning them to a Christ-less eternity? That discomfort

should be in the forefront of our minds. We should never be comfortable that our families have fallen away from the faith.

When we see our families walk away from Jesus, that should break our hearts. If it doesn't, please, for the love of God, check your pulse! But to be clear, our motivation is the love of Christ, not guilt. Guilt will not solve anything. Guilt will not motivate a person to know Christ or attend church. Guilt will not solve anything in your relationships. So let that guilt go.

We don't expect people to show up at church "just because." The younger generation does not view church the same way you do. This is not a place for information. They have that everywhere else. This is not even the place for friends. Their friends do not attend church.

So what do we offer? I can think of a few things. We have an intergenerational community. Young and old, serving Jesus side by side. That's something rare to find anywhere else. We have the sacraments – that communion that I risked to receive even though I wasn't a Lutheran. We practice the open table in the United Methodist Church, but if you think it will help, tell your kids it's a scandal! "They'll let anybody receive communion here. Can you believe it!" We offer baptism, entrance to the family of God. We don't just have information about God, we offer a relationship with God. We have the antidote to fake, superficial religion. We have the words of life.

And there is one final thing that the church offers that you will not find anywhere else. We offer direction in the face of suffering and death. This is one of the strongest encouragements that we have, if you are brave enough to believe it. We offer a family connection that lasts through eternity. Maybe it is time for a conversation about heaven and hell. I know I'm not a "fire and brimstone"

preacher. I rarely talk about these great mysteries. But maybe we should. Maybe our conversation with our children can start with the question, “What do you believe happens to you when you die? May I share my belief with you?”

We need to fan the flame of faith in our children’s lives. This is a gift of God, not something you can ever force on someone. Yes, we have lost a generation in the church. But the good news is, that generation still needs God, now more than ever. We are living in a world that is less and less stable. The good news that we have is too good not to share.

Jesus once told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and the rest of the world. These are ever widening circles, starting with the closest to their hearts. Your family is your Jerusalem. Start there and expand outward. Tell your story to your children, before it’s too late. And then watch the miracle of God as faith grows in their hearts.

Memory verse

1 Timothy 4:12b – “Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”

Reflection questions

1. What person in your family taught you the most about the Christian faith?
How do you continue their legacy?
2. Think of one person in your family who does not know Jesus. What are their concerns, motivations, fears, and needs? How could God fulfill them?
3. How often do you share your faith? What discomforts hold you back?
4. What is the greatest desire of your heart concerning your family’s faith?
How can Jesus help you achieve that?