



*United Presbyterian Church*

*Harrodsburg, Kentucky*

*Sunday November 1, 2020*

*Rev. Bert Eyster*

*2 Timothy 1:3-14; Luke 17:5-10*

**Sermon: In Touch with Faith**

How could Jesus be so angry? Jesus criticized his disciples when they would not do what he asked and for their lack of faith. Just a mustard seed faith, that's all he wanted them to have. Did they have so little that it could not be seen or felt?

After they are unable to cure epileptic seizures, the disciples cry out to Jesus. They ask him to increase their faith. Jesus tells them that quantity is unimportant. The disciples did not need faith the size of an acorn or a potato. If genuine faith is present, i.e., visible, it will have the power to achieve its intended purpose. It can move trees or even mountains.

### **1. Do we Presbyterians need this faith?**

Can it be that God is trying to get our attention? Does declining membership have something to do with faith? Can all mainline denominations who neglect evangelism and see in their declining numbers, a problem? We might be as dense as were the disciples.

The guide was taking a group of tourists through Mammoth Cave. When they reached "The Cathedral" he mounted a rock called "The Pulpit," and said he would preach a sermon. It was short. All he said was "Keep close to your guide." The tourists soon found it was a good sermon for if one did not keep close to the guide he would be lost in the midst of pits, precipices, and defiles. It is hard to find one's way through Mammoth Cave without a guide; it is harder to find one's way through the world without the lamp of God's Word. A good motto for Christians is, "Keep your eyes on the lamp."

What is it about people that cause us to ignore clear warnings? Why do people remove the safety shield from power saws? Why do we ignore our doctor's warnings about being overweight and under exercised? Why do entire civilizations ignore warnings about pollution?

In some ways, the whole Bible could be characterized as a book about how God gives the human race warnings and we ignore them. God warns Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they will die. Moses tells Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people

go or God will visit plagues upon Egypt. Even when the plagues start coming, Pharaoh refuses to listen. The prophets tell Israel to change its ways or suffer the consequences, but Israel ignores the prophets, beats them, even kills some of them — and suffers the consequences of invasion, slavery and exile.

Jesus warns his disciples that their faith must be visible. Is yours?

## **2. What is a visible faith?**

It is relational. Second Timothy has been referred to by some as a kind of Pauline “last will and testament” — wherein Paul confesses both the depth of his feelings to Timothy and the unswerving intensity of his faith to the Christ body community, the church.

Paul recalls for Timothy how he was filled with God's spirit of power and love and self-discipline through the ritual of the laying on of Paul's own hands. This symbolic touch forever joined together Timothy and Paul as brothers in Christ and for Christ's mission to the world.

“Did you ever notice,” said the old lady, smiling at the troubled face before her, “that when the Lord told the discouraged fishermen to cast their nets again, it was right in the same old place where they had caught nothing? If we could only get off to some new place when we get discouraged, trying again would be an easier thing. If we could be somebody else, or go somewhere else, or do something else, it might not be so hard to have fresh faith and courage; but it is the same old net in the same old pond for most of us. The old temptations are to be overcome, the old faults are to be conquered, the old trials and discouragements before which we failed yesterday, only to be faced again today. We must win success where we are, if we win it at all, and it is the Master Himself, who after all these toils, disheartening failures, bids us ‘try again.’ ”

Paul would have agreed wholeheartedly with that old lady's judgment. Imprisoned, alone, cut off physically from those he most loved and from the churches he had helped nurture into existence, Paul's emotional longings speak clearly throughout second Timothy. Though physically isolated, Paul spiritually connects himself to his own past. He gets back “in touch” with the grounding strength and support of his Jewish ancestors' faith — a heritage that allows him to celebrate the fact that he has always worshiped the one, true God. Paul then reminds Timothy that he, too, has a heritage of faithfulness that will keep him “in touch,” “in Christ,” no matter what the challenge. For Timothy, the line is drawn matriarchally — from grandmother to mother to himself.

(Please note that our faith is not gender specific. The church should not have taken two thousand years to ordain women.) In Timothy's family, it is a common faith — not business, not money, not things — that keeps one generation in touch with the next. What is visible faith? It is relational — from generation to generation and all tied together in God. It is not out there somewhere. It is in the same old pond, the same old net, with the same people he was raised with.

It is not what we believe in. It is whom. Paul reminds Timothy in whom he believes, Jesus Christ. Christ is the source of the saving grace that binds him to God and all the saints, including his mother and grandmother.

### **3. Visible faith is “touchy feely.”**

When you want to reject an experience or an idea as ridiculous or silly, what do you say? Don't we often label it as “touchy-feely”? Gushy, emotional, illogical displays are dismissed as “touchy-feely.”

For most of us in the United States, and especially within the sanctuaries of our faith communities, we are far too hung up on the “tact” in “tactile.” Ours is a “hands-off” culture. A “don't touch me” spirit pervades both the sacred and the secular spaces in our lives.

Despite our rigid-necked, straight-backed, stiff-armed approach to getting touched and being in touch, the health benefits of touch have been clearly proven by our own hard-nosed scientific methods. Tactile stimulation is a powerful stimulant to infant growth and development.

Studies also show that the elderly benefit from touch in much the same way. Among those who received regular touching, from massages to hugs to holding hands, the following was found: Their motor skills remained sharper, their mental abilities continued to be acute, and their general state of health was better than among those who reported virtually no physical contact with others. The touch didn't even have to be human. The simple act of petting a dog or stroking a cat seems to help our physiological need for physical contact.

For the past fifty years our society has been in retreat from touching. We have been posting “hands-off” signs at schools, workplaces, even at home and at church. And for good reason. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people have been scarred by inappropriate touch in school, at work, and even in the church. Yet, our text suggests that NOT touching is also at least a form of neglect, at worst a form of actual abuse.

Can your faith pass the “pinch test”? If you touch it, is it real?

When touched by another's suffering, do you weep?

When touched by another's joy, do you laugh?

When touched by another's pain, do you ache?

When touched by another's warmth, are you comforted?

When touched by another's coldness, are you chilled?

When touched by another's sorrow, do you mourn?

When touched by another's love, do you multiply that love and send it on?

Two men examined a painting of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus. One commented on how well the artist had grouped people and how full of awe the faces were. The other one said, “But look over here on the steps of the house in the corner of the picture. Do you see the discarded cane lying there?” “Yes,” said the other, “But what does that signify?” “The blind man, who was brought to Jesus, was so sure that he would be healed that he left his cane behind, never to be used again.” Too often, we hold on to canes, crutches, the same way of doing things instead of looking only to Jesus. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Paul's heartfelt words to Timothy combined the touch of a genuine (agape) relationship between believers with the saving touch of grace offered by Christ. Paul and Timothy and all those who are together with them “in Christ” share in the saving event of Christ's resurrection. That is the divine touch of pure love as it was embodied by Christ defeating death itself for our sake. And not just death when we die, but “dead ins” in life itself.