

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1.7.

For the coming weeks I want to switch from the OT to the NT, from 1 Sam to a letter of St Paul not much read, 2 Timothy. I would like you to imagine the setting of this short letter. St Paul is by now an old man. After 30-odd years of preaching about Jesus he is now ready to hand over the baton to a young man called Timothy. Paul is in prison in Rome for his faith, and Timothy is pastoring a congregation in Ephesus. Now this Christian congregation was a tiny, harassed community in a pagan city. There was the worship of the emperor, but particularly in Ephesus the sex-cult of Diana. Timothy's congregation was threatened not only by what was going on all around them, but also by false teaching *within* the congregation. 2.18 hint at some warped version of the Resurrection. The trouble is that Timothy is a rather shy, introverted character, young and inexperienced. I've been a young minister, only 24 when I was ordained. I know how hard it is to stand up to older people without appearing petulant.

And that is why St Paul writes this letter, to put some backbone in 'timid Timothy' and to get him to stand up for the truth. The reason I would like us to spend a few weeks thinking about this 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Paul to Timothy is that I believe it speaks to us today. Think about it. We Christians are now a beleaguered minority in a heavily secular world that is using Political Correctness, Human Rights, anti-discrimination laws to shut us up, as the Romans tried 2,000 years ago. If Ephesus was the centre of the erotic cult of Diana, so today we are surrounded by sex, sex, sex. And some

of our church leaders are so overcome by the criticisms of Christianity that they have given in. Many of them doubt the reality of Christ's resurrection, the Virgin Birth, our Lord's miracles or the Bible as God's Word. They are cowards like Timothy, too frightened to be valiant for the truth, too anxious to be liked. And we in the *congregations* are timid also, aren't we? Over the years we have been so brow-beaten by the humanists that we are now too frightened to mention Jesus. We have agreed to keep our faith private; that's *timidity*.

So you can see that what Timothy was dealing with 2,000 years is ago is not so very different from today, and most of us, if we are honest, are more like 'timid Timothy' than the stalwart Paul, so valiant-for-truth. And yet we know from the Bible that Paul really loved Timothy like a son; Just look at v2... In *Phil 2.20* Paul says he has no-one like Timothy. And he knew the whole family - his mother Eunice and granny Lois, v5... By the way, did you think that Lois was a modern name? The most famous Lois is, of course, Superman's girlfriend! Even in Paul's time it was the *women* keeping the faith alive.

So let's have a look at the opening of this powerful letter, which, I believe, has so much to tell us today. Vv1-2... Do you know, when I go to some churches and hear the sermon, I do wonder what it is all about. If I were coming in for the very first time, I don't think I would be able to work out what this Christianity-thing is. But look here in this letter. In v1 alone you've got 'Christ Jesus' *twice*, 'God' and 'life'. The focus is pretty clear. And now look at v2 ... 'God' again, who we learn is 'Father', 'Christ Jesus' again who is our

Lord, our boss, and then the great themes of 'grace, mercy and peace'. And just for extras we read here in v2 that this grace, mercy and peace are gifts *from* God. In 29 Greek words we've got right to the heart: we've hit the runway and the rubber is burning - God, Jesus, life, grace, mercy, peace. No-one hearing that could be in any doubt what this Christianity-thing is all about. Dear friends, it's about *life*.

Well, there's no big deal about that, you might say. We're all in favour of life. But are we? The late Pope John Paul II used to speak about our living in a modern culture of death. Euthanasia and abortion seem to be the order of the day. Muslims, especially these suicide-bombers, scream at us, 'You in the west love life, but we love death'. And just look at this last century with all the death and destruction of the two world wars, and it's still going on. It was in the 20thC that we invented the words 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing'. And in the moral course of events at home I see so many working their guts out in the week, stressed to death, (yes, to *death*), and then getting smashed at the weekend. Well, to be honest, I do not call that *life*.

But God in Jesus Christ has promised us *real* life, and that is what is on offer. But again, would a stranger coming into our churches today *guess* that that is what is on offer through Jesus? These wonderful opening verses of 2 *Tim* help us to get the focus right. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Through his dying on the Cross he brings us life. 'I am come that they might have life', says Jesus in *Jn*10.10. 'He that hath the Son

hath life' we read in 1 Jn5.12. I feel most fully alive when I am worshipping God; when I am helping someone in need.

And this life is not something we earn by becoming good enough. It's a gift, a gift from God. And the great Bible word for that is grace. How many times must I say that Christianity is so wonderful because it is not about what we can do for God? It's what he can do for you. Look again in v1, life is a promise from God: that's grace ... Mercy and peace are gifts of God: it's grace, v2... And no-one will convince me that this world does not need mercy and peace. In this unforgiving world where people hang on to their grudges and keep rows going, we desperately need God's gifts of mercy and peace. They are 'from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord'. A world which rejects God will never have mercy and peace.

But look at v7 which speaks of yet *more* gifts from God: not *timidity*, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline, v7... Do you really believe that this world does not desperately need love and self-discipline, the spirit of restraint? We don't need the power of money, and big guns: *that* power, that human power has done enough damage. But we do need God's power. Again, too many Christians don't expect too much from God. He is just a rule-maker who judges us. No! He can do great things. We aren't excitable here in St Paul's, but God has answered prayers here. God has been powerfully at work in individual lives. Jesus is still working, because he's the same yesterday, today and for ever. He is a God who is able, a God who through Jesus is still bringing hope and life. So stop being a timid Timothy, and get out there and tell people.