

Words of Encouragement 2 Timothy 1:1-12; 4:6-8

"Famous last words", is more than a cliché. When notable people pass away, the world waits to hear their final words of wisdom and insight.

When families gather around the hospital bed, they listen carefully to the last words their loved one will ever speak.

In a related story, a Catholic priest, a Protestant minister, and a rabbi are discussing what they would like people to say after they die and their bodies are on display in open caskets.

Priest: I would like someone to say "He was a righteous man, an honest man, and very generous."

Minister: I would like someone to say "He was very kind and fair, and he was very good to his parishioners."

Rabbi: I would want someone to say "Look, he's moving."

One of the most influential, knowledgeable, and beloved men of history was the apostle Paul. Paul died in AD 67 with 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament to his credit.

At the time of writing 2nd Timothy, Paul was close to his death. He was in a Roman prison, convicted of being a follower of Jesus of Nazareth.

Knowing he would soon be executed, Paul wrote his final words to his beloved Timothy, passing the torch of leadership to him. Paul was determined to encourage Timothy in the faith. He also wanted to remind him of what was really important and the responsibility that comes with leadership. 2nd Timothy is Paul's final letter to Timothy.

Not dissimilar to 1 Timothy, Paul opens this letter with his personal declaration of who's he is. He makes it clear that he belongs to Christ.

Then he says, as he wrote in his first letter, "To Timothy, my beloved child. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord".

Try to put yourself in Timothy's shoes. He had been ministering on his own in Ephesus for 4 years. Paul had put him in charge there as he needed to move on. For the first time ever, Timothy was in charge of a church, rather than being Paul's right hand man. Imagine how Timothy must have felt reading what he must have known would be his beloved mentor's final words to him. Because of the particular context, this is Paul's most intimate and moving letter.

Paul's second letter to Timothy offers a picture of Paul at the end of his ministry, settling his accounts and preparing for the inevitable. At the close of the letter, in chapter 4, Paul mentions a significant number of people – some of whom had wronged him and others who had served faithfully alongside him. It is like Paul is giving Timothy a state of the church address, updating Timothy on the current state of their acquaintances and friends in the faith so that the young pastor could carry on after Paul's departure.

It had not been easy for Timothy to separate from Paul initially and be left in charge of the church in Ephesus with all of its diversity and turmoil. He knew only too well that news of Paul's death would impact his ministry, and not for the better! In fact at some point after Paul's death, Timothy himself was imprisoned.

Paul knew only too well that Timothy's task of keeping the church within the bounds of sound Christian doctrine, and encouraging believers to live their lives well for the sake of Christ, would be an often thankless and difficult task. Paul knew that hardships would come, and he wanted Timothy to continue in those things he had learned, drawing deeply upon his faith...faith inspired and nurtured by Timothy's mother and grandmother so long ago, and in more recent years, Paul.

Do you remember in 1 Timothy when Paul encouraged Timothy to 'fight the good fight'? In this second letter, looking back on his own ministry, Paul turns that phrase on himself and says that he 'fought the good fight'. He 'finished the course'. He 'kept the faith'. He had

persevered and done all of this, in the face of countless hardships – including imprisonment.

Imagine the comfort and inspiration that Timothy must have felt, knowing that his mentor boldly modeled his perseverance in the faith, even to the point of death.

To exhort, means to emphatically urge someone to do something. Paul exhorted Timothy to persevere with diligence, like a soldier. ‘Shun vain babblings, flee youthful lusts, minister with zeal against error, but with meekness of spirit’. Quite a combination of virtues to which we should inspire!!

I am absolutely certain that you have heard people who have suffered great trials in their life and have grown stronger in their faith as a result. Certainly that was the case with Paul. He had suffered greatly throughout his ministry. In chapter 3 he warns Timothy that all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. He is

trying to strengthen Timothy's resolve so that he will remain steadfast, even in the face of adversity. Can you relate to this?

In the 2nd chapter of Timothy, Paul points to Jesus as the best possible example of a good man who suffered a horrible treatment. Paul reminds his beloved Timothy, that suffering comes with defending and promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He encourages Timothy to endure afflictions and to fulfil his ministry. He tells Timothy that even though so many had abandoned him in his time of great trouble, the Lord had remained faithful. Paul is giving Timothy the advice that he himself followed. Stand firm in the faith!

So from a dark, dank prison cell, shortly before his death, Paul writes his last words to Timothy. The Roman emperor Nero was becoming madder by the day. The great fire of Rome occurred in AD 64, burning half the city. With the citizens of Rome in an uproar, Christians became a convenient target for Nero, who used believers as scapegoats. Paul

was caught up in Nero's mad and vengeful path. Paul was beheaded by Roman soldiers shortly after writing his letter to Timothy.

6 Chapters in 1st Timothy, 4 chapters in 2nd Timothy, Paul's two letters written approximately 3 years apart, to the young man whom he had mentored.

There is so much to take from these 2 short books - the potential power of influence in the lives of one another, how others influence us – how we can influence others, the reality that the Christian life is not an insurance policy against the trials and tribulations of this world, the exhortation for us all to fight the good fight, to persevere in our desire to live the kind of life that Christ exemplified. There is so much to consider in all of these:

Who are the people who have influenced your lives in significant ways?

Upon who's lives have you had a powerful impact?

What have been the struggles in your life? Consider the struggles of those around you? Has it been shocking to learn that your faith has not kept you from suffering?

Have you given it your all? Have you fought the good fight? Have you persevered in your life for the sake of those things which really matter?

When you consider the life of Jesus Christ – taking a stand against injustice, caring for the marginalized, being present for those who needed support, going the extra mile, forgiving, including, being an advocate for equality for all people....how are you doing? What are you doing well in this regard? Where do you need to get stronger? Are you willing to fight the good fight?

God bless you on your journey!

Amen