

Give Thanks: For Our History  
Oct 23, 2022 Montavilla United Methodist Church  
Rev. Heather Riggs

## **2 Timothy 1:1-14 CEB**

**1** From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, to promote the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. **2** To Timothy, my dear child. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

**3** I'm grateful to God, whom I serve with a good conscience as my ancestors did. I constantly remember you in my prayers day and night. **4** When I remember your tears, I long to see you so that I can be filled with happiness. **5** I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you. **6** Because of this, I'm reminding you to revive God's gift that is in you through the laying on of my hands. **7** God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled.

**8** So don't be ashamed of the testimony about the Lord or of me, his prisoner. Instead, share the suffering for the good news, depending on God's power. **9** God is the one who saved and called us with a holy calling. This wasn't based on what we have done, but it was based on his own purpose and grace that he gave us in Christ Jesus before time began. **10** Now his grace is revealed through the appearance of our savior, Christ Jesus. He destroyed death and brought life and immortality into clear focus through the good news. **11** I was appointed a messenger, apostle, and teacher of this good news. **12** This is also why I'm suffering the way I do, but I'm not ashamed. I know the one in whom I've placed my trust. I'm convinced that God is powerful enough to protect what he has placed in my trust until that day. **13** Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you heard from me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **14** Protect this good thing that has been placed in your trust through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

## **Give Thanks**

Did you know that United Methodists only have 2 doctrinal statements?

[\*By Water and the Spirit\*](#) our statement on Baptism

And

[This Holy Mystery](#) our statement on Communion.

Which isn't to say that we don't have theology and statements of belief. We also have the historic Methodist Articles of Religion and the Evangelical United Brethren

Confession of Faith which are an unchangeable part of our Book of Discipline, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/doctrinal-standards-in-the-united-methodist-church>

and John Wesley's sermons and notes <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/>

And if you're curious about all these resources, I have links embedded in the text of my sermon where anyone can access these tools for free. The text will be up on the Montavilla website by Monday.

But since Methodists are mostly engaged in practical theology, our primary tool for trying to understand what God is saying to us now is what we call the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Don't worry, there will be no math!

We call it the Wesleyan Quadrilateral because there are 4 things that we take into special consideration when we are trying to understand God.

### **Wesleyan Quadrilateral**

- Scripture - that is, the Bible
- Tradition - not just the way we've always done it, but the fullness of the writings, rituals, and practices of all branches of Christianity
- Reason - John Wesley was writing before the discovery of the scientific method, so what he meant by reason was not only good sense, but also what we would now call science.
- Experience - our own spiritual experience of God.

As we enter into this series on Giving Thanks for God's abundance by practicing good stewardship of what God has given us, I want to begin by giving thanks for our History and Traditions. Or as the author of 2 Timothy, who was probably not the apostle Paul, wrote, "We give thanks for the "authentic faith, which first lived," (2Tim 1:5) in those who have gone before us."

After all, what is Tradition, but the experiences of God - the authentic faith - passed down to us from those who came before us?

This does not mean that we must always do what has always been done before, as if tradition is nothing but being bossed around by dead people!

This does not mean that we are burdened with a list of old stuff and old practices that nobody really likes, but we feel obligated to keep doing.

Tradition is not a musty list of cants, musts, and have to's!

NO!

Our Christian Tradition is the authentic faith of Timothy's grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice and all the people who came after them.

Our Christian Tradition includes the authentic faith of Julian of Norwich who survived the 1348–1350 pandemic of Bubonic Plague and wrote so deeply of faith amidst suffering, including these meditative words, "all shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." (Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. Penguin, 1966. Julian of Norwich. *Showings*. New York: Paulist Press, c1978.)

Our Christian Tradition includes Martin Luther's commentary on the book of Romans, which strangely warmed the heart of John Wesley, and led him to become the founder of Methodism. <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-aldersgate-day>

Here's a short excerpt from Luther's commentary that strangely warmed Wesley's heart:

*Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God (cf. John 1). It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. What a living, creative, active powerful thing is faith! It is impossible that faith ever stop doing good. Faith doesn't ask whether good works are to be done, but, before it is asked, it has done them. It is always active. Whoever doesn't do such works is without faith; he gropes and searches about him for faith and good works but doesn't know what faith or good works are. Even so, he chatters on with a great many words about faith and good works.*

[https://www.ccel.org/l/luther/romans/pref\\_romans.html](https://www.ccel.org/l/luther/romans/pref_romans.html)

Our Christian Tradition includes Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's letter from a Birmingham Jail, which feels so relevant today as a new wave of civil rights protests have affected our own city. Here's a little portion of that letter.

*Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.*

*We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during*

*that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a Communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws.* <https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf>

These writings (and many more) from our Christian Tradition that now seem so weighty and important, were once the lived experiences - the authentic faith - of ordinary people who did not experience much respect in their own lifetimes. Their words set my feet back on the path when my heart is heavy.

I love the wisdom tradition of our faith.

But I am here among you, as a Christian and a Pastor because...

Some unnamed apostle taught Lois and Eunice the faith,

Then, Lois and Eunice taught Timothy the faith.

Then, Timothy taught his faith to others,

Who shared their faith with others,

Who shared their faith with others,

Who lived their faith by transforming cathedrals into hospitals during the plagues of the 1300's who nursed Julian of Norwich back to health.

And that experience of faith, was shared with the next generation and the next and the next...

And Martin Luther, grounded in the mercy of our tradition, felt compelled in the 1500's to protest the poor being conned out of money they needed to eat because they thought they needed to buy their way out of purgatory.

And John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed by some unnamed Moravian reading Luther's words 200 years later, which set Wesley's feet upon the path that led to this church.

And their protests and preaching and writing and recruiting of thousands of unnamed faithful people, did reform the church.

Until, one day a faithful woman volunteered to teach my remedial Catholic Catechism class, and my Great Aunt took me to St. John's Lutheran Church, and others introduced me to the writings of Julian of Norwich, and Martin Luther and Martin Luther King.

And here we are.

It is a miracle that the church - the beloved community of those who keep the faith in Jesus, still exists today, 2000 years later.

The church is a miracle that has mostly passed from one ordinary, unnamed person, to another.

From Lois and Eunice to young Timothy.

From grandparents and parents and Sunday School teachers and random faithful souls down through the centuries to you.

And it's our act of stewardship to pass our authentic faith to the next generation.

For our Spiritual Practice today, I want to invite you to give thanks to our spiritual forebearers.

Give thanks for both the great writers who challenge and comfort us.

Give thanks for all the ordinary people who introduced us to Jesus.

Give thanks for the people who established this church for this community.

Let us choose to Give Thanks for those who came before us, even as we worry about the future and maybe mourn what used to be.

And let us choose to commit ourselves to being good stewards of the authentic faith that has been entrusted to us.

Because we are stewards of the faith - not only of the building and resources entrusted to us, but stewards of the \*faith\* passed on to us, that we must now pass on to others.

And I know. I know! That as mainline, institutional church, Methodists, the idea of passing on the faith, possibly to people we don't even know yet, is a little scary. And we wonder if we're really up to the challenge of passing on the authentic faith to the next generation.

But - God has entrusted this precious gift of authentic faith to us.

And as the author of 2 Timothy, wrote:

**“I’m convinced that God is powerful enough to protect what he has placed in my trust until that day.” (2Tim 1:12)**

**Who passed the faith to you? What was authentic about their faith?**

“ I’m convinced that God is powerful enough to protect what he has placed in my trust until that day.” (2Tim 1:12)

So for our spiritual practice today, I want to invite you to turn to your neighbors, and share, who passed the faith to you? Who were the Lois and Eunice’s in your life? And what did they do that made their faith seem authentic to you?