



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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“Come Before Winter IV”

Ingathering Sunday

November 20, 2005

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How many here will go to a Grandma’s house for Thanksgiving? (either yours, or someone else’s?). When we visit my folks, we go around a curve and then up a hill, and then we all watch so we can be the first one to see the farm. The kids get excited. Leigh and I get excited. There’s just something about Grandma’s house at Thanksgiving. When I first heard the words “come before winter” I thought of Thanksgiving at my folks’ farm up north. But how different that is from the setting in which they were penned...

“Come before winter...” Words by Paul the Apostle in a famous letter, from a dungeon in Rome. He’d been transferred from house arrest to the dungeon—dark, cold, damp. And there by the dim light, he begins to write. Paul knows his time is up. He’s awaiting a certain execution. He had faced great persecution and hardship to spread the Gospel. In his last journey he was abandoned by many. He knew it was the end. So he writes his young friend, Timothy. He asks Timothy to come with John Mark, and bring Paul’s cloak and parchments. But at the beginning of the letter he makes reference to two women. Without these women, Timothy and Paul’s story would have been very different. Starting in 2 Tim. 1:5, Paul writes *“I have been 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. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you-- guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.”* (after that, we need to pray!...)

Timothy had a spiritual heritage. Paul knew his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. The book of Acts tells how Paul and Timothy met in 16:1 *“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.”*

Paul writes his last recorded letter to Timothy and reminds him of his Grandma’s faith, in order to inspire him to come before winter. Think of the smells in that dungeon, the atrocities there in his prison cell. How did God

provide comfort for Paul? By reminding him about Timothy's grandma's faith. Paul writes "*I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice.*" How cool that Paul can fall back on his friends' faith in such a tough time. It challenges me. I want to have the kind of faith that doesn't just help me through, but helps people around me. When someone is facing a difficult "winter" in their life, a "new normal," you can pray that your faith will be the kind of faith that would inspire them and see them through. Paul describes it as SINCERE, LIVING, AND PASSED ON TO OTHERS. A GRANDMA'S FAITH. As we think about what we need to do before winter, I want this church to have the kind of faith that inspires others during the hard times of winter, whether they're here or not! As Paul writes to Timothy to come before winter, at a time when Paul needs him most, he reminds Timothy of his Grandma's faith.

What does a Grandma's faith look like?

It's a daily faith.

It's a servant's faith.

It's a faith that knows its mission.

A Grandma's Faith is a Daily Faith.

- It's lived out every day. It knows the ups and downs of life. It's not fancy, with all kinds of mountaintop experiences, but a daily, simple, lived-out faith. And it's not just Sundays! It makes me ask, does your faith show in a daily way? God never intended the Bible to be studied for information alone. He wrote it to impact lives. Interesting that the book of the 1st Century church is the book of Acts.
- A daily faith is a listening faith. In the daily-ness of life, Grandma admits she doesn't have all the answers. But you know what? That's okay. She doesn't lose her credibility. If Grandma never struggles with the maybes, you *know* the rest of the family would wonder about her! There'd be serious doubt about what she really DID know. With a *listening* faith, you can be honest. You don't have to have all the answers. Jesus IS the truth and at the same time REVEALS the truth. He is Truth Incarnate—incarnate, in the flesh, organic, and relational.
- How do you become a better listener? You ask questions—lots of questions. When you ask questions, it shows that you care. It shows you have an intimacy with someone. The same goes for God. Asking God questions shows intimacy with God, not distance. Throughout the whole Bible, people ask God questions! Even Jesus asked hard questions! *Matthew 27:46 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Questions are rooted in humility. Questions mean you don't have the answer within you. God can handle your questions!
- A daily faith is a seasoned faith. It lives through a lot. Like a Grandma. Her faith has been hit, stretched, and even challenged. It's been through wars and hard times. From the Middle East to Somalia to Central America, Grandmas live in the tension. They know you can't clean up the world too quickly. But those who have this faith live in the *resurrection*. Grandma knows there's a surprise ending! My believing Grandma would tell me "In all my 90 years, either God made me strong enough to get through it, or He put someone in my life to get me through." Can *you* be like that for someone in their winter seasons? A grandma's faith is a daily faith.

A Grandma's faith is a servant's faith. The heart of God is to serve a broken world. When Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist, he reminded us that only he could wash away our sin. When the church refuses to serve the world around her, she begins to atrophy. She begins to waste away.

- The purpose of the church cannot be to survive or event to thrive but to serve. Sometimes servants die in the serving. In the New
- Grandma’s faith, you *know* you can rely on Him. You know we can trust Him. You know that God is faithful. You don’t alwa nderstand Him, but you’ve learned you can trust Him. Listen—if you are a *new* believer, you don’t have to believe all of this yet. All you have to put your faith in is that God has come as Jesus Christ to put the world back together. His way is *not* one of power, but based on love. Jesus is making a whole, new, better world. As you come to trust Him, you’ll realize His power to do the impossible—from the virgin birth to 3 days in the belly of a whale. But we’re not asking you to have to swallow all that now. Just trust Jesus. As you come to know him and experience Him, you’ll see. That’s the mission of a Grandma’s faith. It enables you to come before winter, so you can experience God even when winter hits.
- Mission faith is about a church “on mission,” not just a church that “supports mission.” The mission field is right outside your front door, if not inside your own house with your family! Our prayer and giving is so that this church can be “on mission.”
- Mission faith is willing to die for what she believes in. She knows her limits, so Grandma directs her energy. She is willing to die for what matters most. How about you? Are you spending energy on what really matters, or are you just messing around? By the way, Grandma’s faith knows what matters most is people.
- A Grandma’s faith understands that the Gospel is a promise of transformation. Another word? Change. Once you belong to Jesus, change is inevitable. You’re no longer “*conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind.*” (Rom. 12:2). All the deep, theological words of Christianity are versions of the word “change.” Sanctification, holiness, repentance, and conversion. All rooted in the reality that God changes people, not just seasons. God is about changing history, or rather making history. But sometimes He does that too.

You may remember the story I shared about the Eastern European babushkas. In my office I have some pieces of the Berlin Wall and some chain link from the Iron Curtain separating Czech Republic from Austria. I treasure them, for the reminder the Christians I met in old East Germany and in Prague. They shared this story:

Joseph Stalin proclaimed that “when the babushkas all died, Christianity would be dead, and communism would have won.” The babushkas were the grandmothers (with scarves around their heads) who would go to church and dust and clean the altar and pews. He prohibited by death any advertising or speaking of the Christian churches outside of the buildings themselves, and every sign was removed. Unauthorized Christian meetings were banned and worship services were government-sanctioned events devoid of most of their meaning.

What Stalin didn’t know was that because the young mothers couldn’t have Sunday school, they would hold weekly “birthday parties.” What he didn’t know was that those babushkas, who were only little girls when the winter of communism took over, were praying all along, and God was hearing their prayers. There was resurrection power in their prayers. What he didn’t know was that young believers from other countries were smuggling in Bibles written in the various native languages there. The day after the Velvet Revolution in Prague in November of 1989, the old pastor of the old Methodist church, who hadn’t been able to post a sign for his congregation in over 40 years, wrote out a sign. On it, were written these simple words: “*The Lamb won. The Lamb won.*”

When you and I say “Yes, Lord,” we are agreeing to be His stewards of all that He has entrusted to us, like Grandma. I still am amazed God trusts me with so much! But He does. Hold tightly to God. Hold lightly to everything else.

Grandma's faith isn't fancy. But it's enough. Enough to do what it takes to "come before winter;" enough to take on the Roman Empire; enough to outlast communism; enough to spread like wildfire throughout the world. Now it's your turn.

One question still bothers me. DID TIMOTHY COME? We don't know. But we know that we can respond today. We can do what we need to do to live out that faith—sincere, lived out, and passed on. A pastor asked a group of children: Why do you love God? One boy answered "I guess it just runs in our family..."