

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, October 2, 2016
Rev. Andrew Reid
2 Timothy 1:1-14; Psalm 37:1-9; Luke 17:5-10
“One bread, one body”

In Anna Karenina, Leo Tolstoy wrote: "all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The longer I am in ministry, the more convinced I become that he was absolutely right.

When families – or individuals, or communities, or congregations, for that matter – are happy, they will share their happiness with everyone. Good news of a job, or a promotion, or an engagement, or a wedding, or a graduation, or an award, or a success of any sort, are all things we want to share so that people can celebrate with us.

I am reminded of a boy in my former congregation. When he was about seven years old, his fondest dream came true: he became a big brother when his long-awaited sister was born. He heard what his father was doing, and he decided he had to do the same. So when he went to school, and when he came to church, he handed out chocolate cigars to everyone he met. Happiness, joy, celebration, they are all contagious.

Unhappiness, on the other hand, is a very different experience. It isolates us. It cuts us off from other people. It is so personal and singular and almost intimate that it can be hard to share. In fact, sharing it can increase the unhappiness.

In Romans 12:15, St Paul urges his readers to *rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep*. As a minister, I have long said that it is a wonderful thing to rejoice with those who rejoice, and thank God, there are lots of opportunities as a minister to do just that. But I have also said that believe that it is a far greater privilege to be allowed to weep with those who weep; to be allowed to enter into their personal space and walk with them through a deeply personal experience; to be trusted, just when people are their most vulnerable, not to deepen their unhappiness, or increase their pain, or add to their sadness.

But the fact is that it is when we are at our most unhappy, as families or individuals or communities or congregations, that we most need – and can most benefit from – the support of others. If we will only be open to receive their support.

On the face of it, the Second Letter to Timothy appears to be a letter from the wise, experienced evangelist Paul to a younger, less experienced follower, Timothy. There is a school of thought among New Testament scholars that the letter may not have been written by Paul himself, but by a follower of his, someone who was familiar with Paul's doctrine and wanted to preserve his thoughts. Which may be the case, but doesn't make much difference to what I would like you to focus on this morning.

Think of the letter as a personal letter. It is addressed to *my beloved child*. Paul says that he is *grateful to God . . . when I remember you constantly in my prayers . . . I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy . . . I am reminded of your sincere faith . . .* 2 Timothy 1:3-5.

And think of it as a letter of encouragement and exhortation: *I remind you to rekindle the gift of God*

that is within you . . . do not be ashamed . . . of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner . . . join with me in suffering for the gospel . . . hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me . . . guard the good treasure entrusted to you 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14.

But above all, think of it as reminder to Timothy that he does not stand alone. Paul says that he remembers Timothy constantly in his prayers night and day; that he is reminded of Timothy's sincere faith, *a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you*; that the gift of God that was within Timothy was received through the laying on of Paul's hands; that his reliance is on God, *who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began . . .* Timothy had heard sound teaching from Paul, *in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*. The Holy Spirit was not just in Timothy but in us. Timothy had received both from God and from the people who came before him and who now stood with him.

Which is what I want to focus on today, as we celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and observe World Communion Sunday. For we too have received from God and from people who came before us and from people who now stand with us.

Think for a moment about the elements of this service today. The prelude was written in 2003 by the Director of Music at Mt Olive Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The processional hymn comes from the Scottish Psalter of 1650, and is set to music from the Genevan Psalter of 1551. The anthem is a setting of a 14th century Eucharistic hymn. It was composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and first performed in 1791 in the parish of Baden bei Wien, near Vienna, Austria. The unison prayer comes from the Anglican Book of Prayer of 1549. The solo was written in 1990 by a Gospel music writer from Arkansas and the music arranged in 2011 by a Southern Baptist from Illinois. The words of the hymn of the faith were written by a Presbyterian minister in Florida for the bicentennial of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the hymn is set to music written by a Church of England clergyman in the 18th century. The Communion hymn was written in 1968 by a minister of the United Reformed Church in England, and is set to music published in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1835. The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving that I am using as part of the Communion liturgy comes from the 1991 Book of Common Worship of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. And the words and the music of our closing hymn were written by a 20th century American Wesleyan organist and composer.

This service would not be what it is without what we have received from our sisters and brothers in faith, in 10 denominations in Canada, the USA, Scotland, England, Austria and Switzerland, from the 16th, 17th 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

No matter how isolated or alone or cut off from others we may feel, we stand in the great company of God's people on earth and in heaven, that great fellowship that transcends space and time and life and death, and makes us one body through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, who in the words of 2 Timothy 1:10, *abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*.

Think about that, the next time you feel that you are alone, that you are facing unhappiness and disappointment and discouragement all on your own. Think about it, and give thanks to God!