

“Rekindle the Gift”

2 Timothy 1: 1-7

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Confirmation Sunday

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There is an old saying that suggests that, **“God has no grandchildren.”** This is a creative way of suggesting that vital faith is not something that we gain through osmosis...not something we simply absorb from others. Vital faith is the product of a choice that is both personal and passionate. No one else can choose a vital faith for us. We can't ride into a meaningful faith on the coattails of someone else. The faith of our fathers and our mothers will only take us so far. After that, it is up to us to own our own faith, to choose it for ourselves.

On this Confirmation Sunday, you young men and young women have indicated your desire to make this choice. For some of you, this choice was set in motion a long time ago by your parents who, at your baptism, promised to raise you in such a way that you would one day choose for yourself a life that becomes the Gospel. Now, that day has come. You have decided to be confirmed as a **“full and responsible member of Christ's holy church.”**

Are you ready? I trust that you are because the simple truth of the matter is this: This church—the San Ramon Valley United Methodist Church—needs you! We need your energy, your passion, your creativity, your commitment. In fact, it is safe to say that our future depends upon you. How's that for adding a little pressure to the moment?!

As you prepare for this important moment in your journey of life and faith, I would like to share with you the wisdom of the writer of Second Timothy, who has some timely advice—not only for the young man, Timothy, but for each one of you who will be confirmed.

Let's listen in on the letter that is written for Timothy's benefit...

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I'm sure, lives in you.”

The writer reminds Timothy that he didn't make it to his present place of faith on his own, but, has inherited a faith tradition that provided a foundation upon which he can build. It is Timothy, to be sure, who must do the building, but it is Timothy's mother and grandmother that have provided the foundation.

So with many of you this morning. It is through the faith of others—parents, grandparents, relatives or friends—that you have been encouraged to share in the confirmation experience. Their witness of faith has invited your own and that is no small thing.

“For this reason,” the writer continues, **“I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands...”**

Here is the recognition and the reminder that the gift of God's Spirit already resides within young Timothy. It is not something that he lacks or has to ask for. It is already within,

made possible by the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands was a ritual observed in the early church that commissioned people for the work of ministry. And it is not by accident that the ritual of confirmation involves the laying on of hands as a means of commissioning you to the work of ministry.

So here is the challenge and the invitation to recognize that you lack absolutely nothing for the journey that is ahead of you. The gift of God's spirit is already at work within you. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to pass a test to qualify. You don't even need to pay a fee! All that is needed, on your part, is the choice to rekindle that gift...to fan it into flame and to use it for good and for God in the choices that you will make in your life.

Now, at this point, you may say to me, "That sounds impressive...but what does it really mean? How might my choice to "rekindle the gift of God" play out in the way that I live my life?

In the 7th verse of our lesson from 2 Timothy, the writer offers an important clue:

"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline."

The writer suggests to Timothy—and to all of us—that the experience of faith is not something that is intended to be expressed timidly or with fear. It is not something to be ashamed of, not something to keep under wraps. No, it is something to share with our world in three distinct ways.

First of all, God has given us a spirit of power! The only problem is that sometimes, we fail to recognize it. Sometimes we allow ourselves to believe that we are really powerless, that the world is coming apart at the seams and that there is nothing that we can do to make a difference. Have you ever felt that way?

I imagine that we all have. But here is the reminder that God has given us a spirit of power. Some of you confirmation students got a taste of that power when you went to Glide Memorial Church and participated in their lively and empowering worship before you then helped to serve lunch to the hundreds of people who came for a good hot meal and some simple kindness from people like you.

That was, I believe, a small sample of the kind of power that God's Spirit provides—the kind of power that reaches out to people who hurt, people who are bruised and broken, people who simply need someone to notice them and care for them. And it is this power, I believe, that can make all the difference—not only in their lives—but the life of our world.

You have power—tremendous power! Your assignment is to realize it and use it for good and for God.

Secondly, God has given us a spirit of love. When all is said and done, it is the spirit of love that is the greatest force in the world. It is love that moves and motivates people in ways that nothing else can. It is love that enables people to find the courage to stand up against injustice...the conviction to work for peace...the hope that makes healing possible.

It is love—God’s love set loose in this world—that is our last best hope for our world. When it appears that evil and injustice have the upper hand, it is love that dares to announce that it is not so—that God’s love, a love stronger than death itself, will prevail. Your assignment, should you choose to accept it, is to love extravagantly!

Finally, God has given us a spirit of self-discipline. We live in a world that would have us believe that it is “all about us,” that our primary purpose in life is consume—to buy those things that make us comfortable and makes life convenient. And we are subjected to this message every time we turn on the television or radio, every time we go on the internet or pick up a newspaper or magazine. Self-interest and self-centeredness are, for some, simply a fact of life.

But the writer of this letter to Timothy reminds us that God expects something more of us than merely the choice to consume our way through a self-centered life. The gift that God gives to us—the gift that needs to be nourished within us—is the gift that calls for us to exercise the type of self-discipline that will enable us to place the needs, the hurts and the hopes of others **BEFORE** our own...the type of self-discipline that reminds us that we are put on this earth for the primary purpose of finding ways to work together for the common good. When all is said and done, you see, it’s not just about you. It’s about us! And God has given us a spirit of self-discipline that enables us to act on this understanding.

In conclusion this morning, allow me to state the obvious: This is a special day—not only in your lives—but in the life of our congregation. We are blessed that you are choosing to play an active role in our life together. And we are excited by the energy, the passion and the joy that you have already brought to the life of this Church.

It is our hope and our prayer that as you begin this new chapter in your faith life, you will do so with the knowledge that we love you and will support on the journey that lies ahead. It is also our hope and our prayer that as you make your way on that journey, you will do so by **“rekindling the gift of God that is within you as we lay hands upon you this morning; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”**

Amen!