

Pentecost 20, Proper 22, Year C, 2013
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

So I wonder
who brought you here this morning?
It's an easy question to answer
for those of you who don't drive - it was whoever
was in the driver's seat.
And of course, if you drove or walked,
you could answer, I did.

But there is a deeper level
to the question.
And that's
a lot more complex.
Who brought you here this morning?
How did you come to walk in these particular doors for the first time?
Did someone invite you?
Did you see an ad
or a website that someone created?
Did you drive past this beautiful building
built by the first members
over one hundred fifty years ago,
and decide to take a look?

And going back further,
Which people influenced you
in your religious choices?
Which people
shaped your faith?

Today
in the second letter to Timothy,
we have one of those rare glimpses
into the personal life
of one of the leaders
of the early church.
And the glimpse we get
is of how he came
to have faith in Jesus Christ.

Timothy
was much younger
than most of the leaders that we read about in the New Testament.
He hadn't met Jesus personally;
his only knowledge
was second hand.
That wasn't uncommon,
especially for Christians who lived outside of Israel,
but most of them
came to faith
through the preaching
of the apostles,
Peter and Paul and a couple of others
who travelled through the Mediterranean
sharing the good news about Jesus.

But Timothy,
his story
was slightly different.
It seems that Timothy, like many of us
was raised
in a Christian household.
As we read today, his grandmother, Lois,
had passed on her faith
to his mother, Eunice,
who in turn
had passed it on
to Timothy.
And Timothy
was in turn
passing it on
to others.

So who
passed their faith
on to you?
Was it your parents?
Was it your godparents?

Being back in Australia this summer
reminded me
of some of the people who shaped my faith,
who brought me here

today.

I didn't have godparents - I wasn't baptised until I was fourteen,
and I guess everyone thought that I was too old
to need official godparents.

Btu there were many other people
whose care and teaching
shaped my faith
through my childhood and young adulthood.

I can't remember the names of my Sunday School teachers,
but I remember how much I loved it,
how there was someone who taught me the song
"Jesus bids us shine"
which we accompanied with actions
and who told me the great stories of the bible
and gave me stickers that said,
God is love.

In fact, one of the things I brought back from Australia with me
is a schoolbook
with some of those stickers stuck all over it.
And whenever I look at those stickers,
I can remember that feeling of absolute security and acceptance and love.

When I was back in Australia,
I had the privilege of catching up
with some of those people
who helped form my faith when I was a teenager
and young adult.

The first was Herman.

I didn't know him well; he was just one of those parishioners
who were always at church
and treated me as a grown up - a big deal when you're a teenager.

I ran into him in August at another church that I was visiting, where he is now a member - he
introduced himself to me
as we went in to church,
and I thought the name sounded kind of familiar,
but it was at the peace
that he came up to me and said,
I remember you.

You were a teenager at the other church.
I keep in touch with what you're doing.

What an encouragement,
for someone to have been kind to you in the past,
and then to reappear in your life
to encourage you
yet again.

Another one was Mary.
She was a lay worker at the church where I went as a college student.
And I have to admit
that I kind of hero worshipped her.
She gave me opportunities to try leadership;
she mentored me.
She was there for me
when things were tough.
And she introduced me to hiking, and lent me her gear
for my first couple of hikes.
Eventually both she and I moved away from that church,
me to go to seminary - in large part because of her influence;
her to raise a family.
We lost touch, though I heard that she was later ordained too.
But we met up again in August,
and renewed our friendship and support for one another.

And of course
there are my parents.
Week by week
they dragged me along to church.
Sometimes I went willingly, especially when I was in elementary school.
Other times, not so much.

But always
living as disciples of Christ
was first priority in our family life,
and that influence has shaped me ever since.

So who influenced you
in your walk in faith?
Who brought you here?

And who might you bring
along with you?

Because the story of Timothy's grandmother and mother

passing on their faith
doesn't end with him.
He has to continue that chain of faith.
And so he is urged
to rekindle the gift he has been given,
to be courageous
in sharing his faith.

And that's something we're all called to do,
to share our faith.
Most of us
aren't formal evangelists like Timothy and the apostle Paul, traveling from place to place
to share the good news in Christ.
For most of us, it's more a matter of the people around us.
We're a little like the apostle Phillip,
who when he first met Jesus,
went and invited Nathanael
to "come and see."

Or like the Samaritan woman
who after talking with Jesus by the well,
went back to her village
and told the people there
to "come and see."

Again, back in Australia,
I was able to catch up with one of the children
who had been in the first parish I worked in.
She turned three
just after I arrived in the parish,
and was present at my ordination to the priesthood
three years later.

I've kept up with her
over the years;
she is now finishing college,
still involved in church,
and drags her friends
along with her.

I had the privilege
of bringing her along in her faith
for a couple of years;

her mother
and others in her parish
have continued to do that.
And now she is in turn passing on her faith.

And I trust there are others,
kids I taught in Sunday School,
adults I studied the bible alongside,
my friends at high school.
People who I've had the privilege of sharing my faith with,
and who have taken it on
themselves.

Of course it's not always easy.
We share our faith;
sometimes
we meet with resistance,
or even antagonism,
or just plain lethargy.

We're not always successful.
We can share our faith with others,
but it's up to them
to take it and run with it.

Sometimes
its our own children or godchildren
who seem to have no interest.

And that's where we need the encouragement of this letter to Timothy.
Because Paul knows
what it is
to feel like you've failed.
And so he keeps on reminding Timothy,
we know
who we believe in,
we know
the power
and grace
of God.
And we can trust that God
will take care of those
who we've entrusted to him.

Even if, right now, they don't seem
to be interested in God.

So who influenced you
in your walk in faith?
Thank them.

And who might you bring
along with you?
Pray for them,
and invite them
to come along with you,
so that they too
can know
the wonderful grace
of God.