

Our DNA

We Honor Our Legacy

II Timothy 1: 1-14

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Pastor Mark Toone

25 years ago, Rachel was a ribbon-cutter for the dedication of this building. 5 years ago, she was ordained as an EPC pastor in this building. Today, she is crossing the border into Ukraine where she will minister to refugees of Putin's invasion. Rachel is one of 21 pastors that we have raised up, ordained, and sent. That...is an important part of what we are talking about here today.

For six weeks we've been discussing "Our DNA;" those nine qualities which, taken together, make Chapel Hill distinctive. There are many strong evangelical churches in our community. But as we continue to grow post-pandemic, as more and more new people make their way into our church, we felt it important to articulate as clearly and transparently as we can, who we are. What makes us, us.

We've divided these distinctives into three sections: *head* (what we believe); *heart* (how we behave) and, beginning today, *hands* (what we do). In the *head* category (our core convictions) we are Reformed, egalitarian (we have both men and women leaders), and Spirit-filled. (We welcome the Holy Spirit into our midst.) In the *heart* category (how we behave), we embrace *humility*, we embrace *courage*, and we embrace *accountability*.

This morning...as we celebrate the day we were welcomed into the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, we honor our legacy. We are diligent to remember...and honor...those who have gone before us, the heritage they preserved...and entrusted to our care. In our self-absorbed culture...a culture that doesn't find much value in the things of the past...this is distinctive. In our individualistic culture...a culture that doesn't value organizations and denominations...this is distinctive. We don't *worship* the past. We don't *live* in the past. We don't *dwell* in the past. But we remember...and honor...the legacy handed to us. And feel compelled to pass it on. We honor our legacy.

Our text is from II Timothy 1. This is the last of Paul's letters we possess, written shortly before his execution. It is addressed to his beloved son in the Lord, Timothy. Listen as Paul reminds Timothy of *his* great legacy of faith.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere father, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 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, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

I am the worst selfie-taker in the world. The other day we visited Deb and Cooper's new hi-rise apartment in Tacoma. We went up to the penthouse observation deck and I was trying to get a picture of us with something cool in the background. This was the final product...but getting there was torturous. I am so pathetic. I can't get everyone in the frame. When I do, it is unflattering. And when I'm finally ready to take the pic, I can't find the button. Ever. Fortunately, if I say, "Smile"...my phone takes a picture automatically. But sometimes it doesn't hear me. Or it mocks me. I'm not sure which. We will sit there, me holding my phone, staring into our own nostrils, and like an idiot, I'm repeating the word, "Smile...smile...SMILE." Those who don't know about this phone- feature, keep smiling bigger and bigger and bigger, all the while thinking to themselves, "I AM smiling. This guy is losing his mind." So...I hate selfies.

But I may be the only one. We live in a selfie age. Every day 92 million selfies are taken. On June 21 we will celebrate "National Selfie Day." We even have a word to describe this obsession: Selfitis. The practice is so prevalent...and disruptive...that more and more areas are being declared "no selfie zones." It is also dangerous. Google "death by selfie" and you will discover an estimated 379 people have been killed while trying to capture a dangerous image that will garner millions of "likes" on social media.

Of course, self-absorption is nothing new. It is the essence of our fallen condition. We humans have always been obsessed with ourselves...with how we look...with how we are perceived...with what others think of us...whether they "like" us or "don't like us." We've just never had the technology to memorialize that self-absorption. Until now.

This is not good, is it? It cannot be good. The danger is glaringly obvious when you discover a body at the bottom of the Grand Canyon with a selfie-stick nearby. But it is more subtly emblematic of an even more dangerous

trend: *a growing indifference to those around us*. A self-preoccupation so acute that it couldn't care less that there are other people around us. And even more, that there are *others who have come before us*. Has there ever been a culture that was less aware...less interested... and perhaps more disdainful of our past...than this one? Our culture has selfitis!

So...what is the antidote for pathological and dangerous self-absorption? Perhaps we find it in Paul's words. Timothy was a gifted young man who felt he was in way over his head. Paul left him in charge of the church in Ephesus. Now, in Paul's absence, Timothy was under attack. False teachers were distorting the gospel. Legalists were perverting grace. And older folks wouldn't give this young leader a chance. The stress drove Timothy to tears. Paul's letter was meant to encourage. And the starting point of his encouragement to press forward...was an encouragement to look backward.

Paul calls to mind Timothy's rich spiritual legacy. "...I am reminded of your sincere faith, *a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice* and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." "I know you are overwhelmed, Timothy. You are feeling alone and battered. You are not. You come from great stock!" What a *gift* it is to have godly, believing parents. I thank God for my Christian home. My parents are in church on Sunday mornings right here. My mom still prays for me. My dad still calls me on Sunday afternoons to brag on my sermon. And grandparents...you have no idea the spiritual impact you can have on your grandchildren; don't doubt it...and don't you dare squander it! Timothy was blessed that his spiritual legacy included a godly mom and grandma. And though his dad was apparently not a believer, Paul was his spiritual father.

Timothy had a rich spiritual legacy and, in this time of his insecurity, Paul reminds him of that. He grounds him in that! Reminds him of the spiritual truths he learned from Lois and Eunice and himself. Reminds him that he stood on the shoulders of those who had gone before him. Reminds him of his own ordination when Paul and others laid their hands upon his head and prayed for him and invited the Spirit to fill him...a Spirit, not of fear...but of power...and love...and self-control! This was Timothy's legacy!

One of the antidotes to spiritual selfitis...is to *remember!* To be *reminded* that we are part of something larger than ourselves. And *longer* than our own lifespan. To remember those who came before us...spiritual fathers and mothers...and grandfathers and grandmothers...people we will never meet this side of heaven...who faithfully, sacrificially gave and led and served so that we might be sitting here today. I will be forever grateful to Paul and Della Ruth

Neel for founding this church that I'm privileged to pastor. I *honor* Paul's memory. I owe him a great debt. And so do you!

And these people. These charter members whose names are captured in the glass over our chapel doors. Ernest Gustafson, Kenneth Hunt, Thomas Wilkinson, Samuel Jeresich, William Kimball, Vincent Skansie. These are the familiar names of our parks and our streets and our Gig Harbor heritage. But did you realize they were also part of our Chapel Hill heritage? You never met them; they're long gone. But *they* sacrificed to buy this land, *they* cleared this property with their own hands...*they* built a chapel larger than they needed because they believed there were others who would come after them.

And look at us...we are those others! We are the fruit their faithfulness! How ungrateful would it be...how selfish...to receive the gift handed down to us...the gift of the gospel of Jesus...the Spirit of Christ...a gift preserved and passed on through the people who built this chapel on a hill...how foolish would it be to forget and neglect the legacy of faith they entrusted to us?

And so...we work diligently *not* to forget. We honor our legacy with a vibrant classic service every Sunday. We honor our legacy with St. Andrews Sunday when we scroll the names of every deceased Chapel Hill member. I always notice the name "Tom Everett"...because his was the first funeral I performed. 360 other names follow...most of whom I buried...and many of whom I remember. Those people were precious to me...and to this church. Once a year we pause to remember them...and thank God for them. This is our legacy and we honor it.

We did the same on Memorial Day just last week. We present the colors and we stand in honor of those who paid the supreme price to protect our right to worship. Fewer and fewer churches do this. It is increasingly out of favor to speak well of our nation; to do anything that smacks of patriotism. But this is our legacy and we honor it.

Our legacy wall reminds us of our past. Our cornerstone reminds of those who gave sacrificially to build this room in which we worship God. Our memorial stone reminds us of those who paid off the remaining \$5 million of debt so we could give ourselves away "beyond these walls"...\$600,000 annually...in perpetuity. This is our legacy...and we honor it.

And we honor our legacy this day as we celebrate being a part of a great denominational home. I realize many of you couldn't care less what denomination we are. To you, we are just Chapel Hill. You came here because you wanted a good place to teach your children, you wanted a place where

you could worship as a family, you wanted a place to help with your marriage or help you overcome your addictions; you wanted a place that served its community. Presbyterian, shmezbyterian. You couldn't care less.

But I care. I care about our Presbyterian legacy. I care that I have a group of pastors who understand me as no one else can...a group of fellow presbyters who support us...pray for us...encourage us. I care that we are a part of something larger than ourselves. That we are accountable to *more* than ourselves. You don't need that so much when things are going well. But when things blow up...as they do...when pastors misbehave...or elders misbehave...when a church goes into a tailspin...*that's* when you are grateful for a denomination. In an age when high-profile pastors are falling left and right...in an age when huge networks of churches shut down overnight...we *need*...we *value* the accountability and support our denomination provides.

You may not think you need a denomination. You may not care right now. But if you are here long enough...you *will* care. You will come to care that you are a part of a larger body of churches that can leverage mission giving, provide relief in times of crisis and plant churches. You will come to care that we are a part of a denomination that is defending our constitutional right to believe and worship as we see fit...at a national level...in a time when those rights are under attack. That, too, is our legacy...and we honor it.

Our legacy is something worth remembering...and honoring. But more than that. It is also something to be passed on. Listen to two more verses from II Timothy 1:

"I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me...By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."
II Timothy 1:12-14

Did you notice the word "entrusted?" It's an ancient banking word. It meant a treasure that had been placed in the care of a custodian who would preserve it, protect it and return it exactly as it had been received. Paul is talking about the treasure of the gospel of Christ. A gospel entrusted to him....and now, he has entrusted to Timothy. This gospel...this 'deposit'...is precious. It is to be "guarded". Protected...preserved...and handed on exactly as received.

That's the second half of legacy. Not only *remembering our past*... but *guarding*...and *handing on*...the treasure entrusted to us. When we say we honor our legacy, we are not just looking backward. We are looking

forward! What is the legacy we will hand on? What will be said of *us* by our spiritual children and grandchildren? Will we be found faithful?

Last week a man in our LifeGroup said, "I was looking at some old Chapel Hill pictures taken in 1972. I didn't recognize a single person in that group. It made me wonder, '50 years from now, what will people think when they look at a picture with *me* in it; someone they won't recognize. What will they think of what I have handed down to them?'" Exactly!

I mentioned our sanctuary cornerstone earlier. Take another look at it: "*When your children ask you, say to them, 'These stones shall be to the Lord a memorial forever.'*" What we have built here...not just buildings...but a spiritual legacy of life and hope and peace through Jesus...a legacy of loving God with all our hearts and loving our neighbors as ourselves...*this* is what we hope to pass on to our children....and our grandchildren. Is there any more important legacy we can hand off to the next generation?

Two weeks ago, our granddaughter, Cici, was in worship with us. Sitting right over there in the front row. She clapped with the music and cheered when a song was done. When she saw my face on the screen, she cried out, "Papa! Papa!" And during the times when she was less engaged, Ezra White, the almost-7-year-old son of Pastors Ellis and Rachel, sat with and entertained her. It was very sweet. But it was the last moments of the service I will never forget. When I asked you to raise your hands to receive the benediction, as we do every Sunday, I looked over and saw this: Ezra standing there...helping to hold a puzzled Cici's hands up in the air to receive *her* blessing.

It was a precious and unforgettable picture of the essential task before us. What will we do to pass on our legacy of faith and faithfulness? What will we do to hold up the arms of the next generation so that *they*, too, might receive the blessing that comes from knowing Christ? What will *you* do to pass on the deposit of faith...the same deposit that was entrusted to you?

These are not easy days to be the Church. Our society is less interested in what we say...and more antagonistic when we say it. Like Timothy, it is easy to feel insecure, timid, outnumbered, and overwhelmed. But...we are not alone. We stand in a great tradition of faith and faithfulness; we have been entrusted a treasure and we have received the Holy Spirit. Let us do our part as Paul's words ring in our ears: "...*fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*" That is our legacy...and we honor it.