

# **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle**

## **A Living Tradition**

### **2 Timothy 1:1-14**

## **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22)**

### **Analysis by Ron Starenko**

2 Timothy 1: 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; 7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, 9 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, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 For

this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. 13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

*Introduction: I located the following sentence in one of Jaroslav Pelikan's writings on the history of Christian doctrine which, I think, addresses the concern that surfaces in this Second Lesson: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living" (The Vindication of Tradition, Yale Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1984, p. 65). As the Christian message passes from one generation to another, given the ever-present danger of the dilution and denial of the good news, we become aware by Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit of the need for renewal, for "rekindling the gift of God that is within us" (v. 6).*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: A Dead Traditionalism**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *A Dying Tradition*  
Timothy corresponds with an early pastor who is clearly concerned about the well being of the church for future generations. Now that the original apostles were nearly gone and fewer new converts could be found, and folks were becoming too settled in the Christian heritage, the leaders of the church began to worry for the future. Would the faith last? Would the baptized remain faithful?

What good pastor today—and what good parent or grandparent for that matter—does not agonize over the absence of young

Christians in the church, not to mention that many of them may have forgotten the gospel of Jesus Christ? Too often the Christian tradition our youth receive seems to be dying, turned into traditionalism, employed mainly for weddings and memorial services and a few other occasions in between. Following the “pattern” (v. 13) and guarding “the truth” (v. 14) is no less a problem today than it was for the church of the New Testament era.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – A Dying Faith**

This is not to say that the “X Generation,” or any other generation, fails to believe in something. Many religions capture our attention. The ancient world had its mythologies, a spiritual world opposed to a material world, and its own self-improvement schemes. Today we simply put new labels on the old heresies. Our culture opts for the philosophies of the East, pop psychology, a watered-down American folk religion (something seemingly less offensive, more positive than the Christian tradition). The pastor who writes to young Timothy regards such things as a denial of the Christian tradition. He calls it unbelief, a lack of “sincere faith” (v. 5) and, bottom line, a false trust in “our works” (v. 9). Anything less than a keeping of “the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (v. 13) is a dying, if not an already dead, faith. A dead traditionalism is the very antithesis of the Christian gospel.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – A Dead Faith**

The dread is not that the Christian tradition per se will die out; rather the awful fear is that without this tradition no one will have a truth to stand behind, no promise to “guard until that Day” (v. 12) when we appear before the One who will judge “the living and the dead.” If our works are dead, if our traditionalism—or whatever else we believe in—is dead, then we cannot escape “the Day.” Falling into the hands of the living God is a terrible thing; a traditionalism that fails to

recognize this is an instrument of death, deserving of divine judgment. Even more terrible is contemplating the possibility that our traditionalism already may have killed us.

## **PROGNOSIS: A Living Tradition**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – A Living Lord**

To be sure, it is not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that scares us to death. Rather, failing to know the living God kills us. But God has not left us without a promise or a prayer. There is a tradition that promises life to all who believe, according to God's "own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago" (v. 9). For a tradition to be a faithful, vital, living tradition, for a tradition to be life giving, it will have to come from the living God—or a dying, crucified God. So Timothy's pastor tells him that the tradition worthy of life has been "manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (v. 10). All the beliefs we have concocted—our works or ideals, our tradition of law and ethics that cannot save, and which bring death to all who trust in them—have been suffered away by Christ, emptied of their power over us, so that traditional sinners like you and me might be redeemed. By the death and resurrection of a faithful Lord, God has given us a "new testament," the tradition of a promise fulfilled, which we received from our "fathers" (v. 3) in past generations. Jesus was faithful to this promise, and so in his own flesh he swallowed up the traditions that deal death, the written code that kills (2 Cor. 4:6); he created in and for himself a people who are as alive as he is, as the living God has always been, through the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 4:6).

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – A Living Faith**

Only a living Lord can produce such a vital faith. A set of principles or doctrines cannot do it; a set of laws obeyed

cannot do it. Only a gospel promise “heard” and “followed” (v. 13) can bring us out of death to life. For to believe is to have what and whom we believe, a Lord who lives here and now for us, whose “life and immortality” (v. 10) dwells within us by the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 14). The tradition that brings life to every generation is one that communicates the living Lord. It is a gospel believed, a baptism received, a meal shared—all gifts of the life-giving Spirit “entrusted” to us (vv. 12, 14).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *A Living Testimony***

Therefore, a tradition worth believing and following is worth perpetuating to our own and every generation. Such a tradition becomes a living testimony to our Lord (v. 8). We get to be courageous witnesses to what we have received. Gone is timidity and shame (vv. 7-8). Instead we are people filled with a spirit of “joy, ... power and love and self-control” (vv. 4, 7). Without worry or fear for the future we get to be part of the company of believers down through the ages who testify to a living faith, the faith of our Lord and his apostles, the faith of those who though they have died yet live. Those who cast their lot with a Lord whose cross and resurrection testify to the power of God have the rare privilege of holding onto and passing on a living tradition.