

I am sure that God is able

2 Timothy 1:1-14

October 3, 2010

I am thinking today about courage. I am thinking today about courageous people. I am thinking today about many of you, because many of you are courageous people. I think it takes courage, a lot of courage, to do the things you do, to make the choices you make, to fulfill the duties you fulfill, day by day by day.

It takes courage to do the right thing instead of the expedient thing, to do the right thing instead of the safe thing, to do the right thing instead of the thing that brings you the most benefit, to do the right thing instead of the thing everybody else is telling you to do. It takes courage to do the right thing.

It takes courage to live your values in the midst of a culture that may often ignore or even scoff at those values: honesty, integrity, self-sacrifice, chastity, mercy.

It takes courage to forgive, to hang in there with a relationship that has gone sour, to tell the truth when it needs to be told instead of ignoring or sugarcoating a bad situation. It takes courage to pray for your enemies, to hope for the best for your enemies, to love your enemies.

It takes courage to act on what you believe, to put your money and your energy and your time and your body where your mouth is. It takes courage not just to talk about compassion, but to show compassion.

It takes courage to be a believer, to say you are a believer in public. It takes courage to live as a believer who takes faith in Jesus seriously, not just on Sundays, but on Mondays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays and Fridays and Saturdays.

It takes courage to talk about what you believe, to talk about Jesus -- with pride and excitement and genuine affection. It takes courage to tell people the truth about where your strength comes from, about where your hope comes from, about where your priorities lie. It takes courage to follow Jesus.

Many of you have such courage. Where did you get it from? From the same place all good gifts come from!

Every good gift comes from God, our Creator.

It's the gift God gave you. It's the gift God gave me. It's the gift God gave my namesake, the gift God gave to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, the recipient of this letter from Paul.

I remind you, Paul wrote to Timothy, I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you.

Keep alive the gift! You, each of you, keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you, or when another minister of the gospel laid hands on you, the gift God gave you when you were baptized! That gift is the gift of God's Spirit -- God's Spirit in you, God's Spirit in us, God's Spirit among us. And "the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid!" No, the Spirit God has given us fills us with power and love and self-control.

The Spirit fills us with power. We are not timid, because we are not intimidated. We are intimidated when we feel overmatched, when we find ourselves in a situation for which we feel unprepared or ill-qualified. You may be intimidated by the idea of public speaking. You may feel you lack the confidence or the experience or the natural ability to be comfortable speaking in front of a crowd of people. We are intimidated when we feel inadequate.

But sometimes we are intimidated too not only by our feelings of inadequacy, but by who's watching! I feel comfortable and confident playing my trumpet in church in front of all of you, but if Jason Weinberger were sitting there, I would be intimidated!

We are intimidated when we feel inadequate or when we feel the judging eyes of the world on us, but we don't have to feel intimidated, because the Spirit fills us with power! The Spirit gives us the message to share, it is not our own. The Spirit gives us words to say, they are not just our own. The Spirit gives us strength, above and beyond our own.

And when we talk about our faith in God, when we live our faith in God, it is not our own reputation we put on the line, it is God's. And God can defend his own reputation, thank you!

You belong to God. There is nothing any other human being can take from you that matters -- not honor, not dignity, not personal value. No other person judges you, only God does. No other person determines your worth, only God does. No other person's approval is needed to make you feel good about yourself, only God's.

So don't be timid! Stand up! Be bold! The Spirit of God fills you with power!

And the Spirit fills us with love, channelling and directing that power. We do not use the power God gives us indiscriminately or aimlessly, but purposefully. We use it not to overcome, but to serve, not to win an argument, but to heal a wound, not to justify ourselves, but point to the love and grace of God.

The work that God calls us to do, the work that God's gift empowers us to do, is love. We stand up and do the right thing not to justify ourselves, not to prove to ourselves or to God that we are good people, but for the sake of love, for the sake of our love for the people God brings across our paths and for the sake of our love for the Lord. It is power and love, working in tandem, that accomplish the work the Lord has for us to do.

And the Spirit fills us with self-control. We act in power. We act in love. And we act in freedom. We are not controlled by the spirit of this age. We are not controlled by common expectations or by common practice, not by what everybody else thinks or by what everybody else does. We are not controlled by the push and pull of our own wants and desires, but we are led by the Spirit that fills us and guides us.

We choose and we do what is right, relying on the strength of will, relying on the self-control, that comes as God's gift to us. Power enables the work. Love is the work. And self-control keeps us on task, keeps us from wasting all our energy and time and passion on things that don't really matter.

The Spirit is God's gift to us, to each one of us, the Spirit that fills us with power and love and self-control. Keep alive the gift that God gave you! Keep the good things that have been entrusted to you! Be the courageous Christians, the bold bearers of Good News that you are!

Be strong! Be confident! Hold fast to Jesus' way! Because ...

I am sure that God is able to keep safe until that Day what he has entrusted to you!