

Thank God for mothers (and fathers)

Message for Sunday, May 12, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15 Acts 16:1-3

1) Lead a child... guide an entire life

Every year we have a special worship service to celebrate our church's anniversary. As the years go by, the numbers get pretty impressive: at Fletcher, we're up to 129 years; at Merlin, 142 years. We must not forget that the quantity is not as important as the quality.

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:5, Today's English Version:

I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also.

Timothy was brought up in the Christian faith by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. We don't know if there were other children in the family. We don't know if Eunice and Lois were leaders in their congregation. They may have been instrumental in shaping the lives of hundreds of people in their church and town. They may have been quiet people with small roles to play. All we know about them from the Bible is that they had a vital role in shaping the life of this one person, Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:15, Today's English Version:

You remember that ever since you were a child, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Again: it isn't the quantity, it's the quality that counts.

As children grow up, we parents are giving them the foundation for the rest of their lives. There is no better foundation for life than Jesus Christ:

Matthew 7:24-25, New Living Translation:

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse, because its foundation is on rock."

The first time Paul met Timothy is recorded in Acts 16:

Acts 16:1-2, Today's English Version:

Paul traveled on to Derbe and Lystra, where a Christian named Timothy lived. His mother, who was also a Christian, was Jewish, but his father was a

Greek. All the believers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy. Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him.

Not only did Eunice and Lois teach Timothy about Jesus; they did it without the help of Eunice's husband, for it appears he was not a follower of Jesus. Raising up your children to know Jesus is a wonderful thing; doing it together as a couple makes it easier to share the load.

Those of who are doing this, or went through this: I want to encourage you and bless you. I know there are days when the burden of responsibility feels too great to bear, and you may wonder whether it's worth it all the trouble. You get everyone washed and dressed and ready to come, then someone gets dirty, or they start fighting, or who knows what. Does anyone notice? Yes! Does anyone care? Yes!

As for you grandparents, God bless you, too. Eunice no doubt depended on the help of her mother Lois. You have a key role as well.

When Paul met Timothy, he was so impressed that he wanted to take Timothy with him on his preaching journey. This was the beginning of a deep friendship between the two men. Paul became Timothy's mentor. (A mentor doesn't just teach the way to do something; a mentor *lives* the way, so the disciple can model that life.) Many years later, when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy (the last letter we know of before he was executed), he called Timothy "my dearly beloved son" [2 Timothy 1:2].

But all this was possible only because Timothy was prepared.

It's fascinating to watch a highway being constructed. First, all the surface dirt is scraped away. Then the ground is made level. Then the foundation is laid: a layer of large rocks. On top of that is a layer of smaller stones. The black pavement is only the finishing touch. Likewise, Eunice and Lois laid the foundation for Timothy. Paul only added the final touch.

2) A look at the numbers

Even though I said that quality matters more than quantity, there are some interesting numbers here. In this 2nd letter to Timothy, 25 people are mentioned by name. Of these:

- 15 are faithful followers of Jesus Christ;
- 4 have moved on, and we don't know what happened to them;
- 3 have forsaken Christ;
- 2 have twisted the gospel astray with false teaching.

- I is an outright enemy of the gospel.

Like the church of the New Testament, so is the church of today:

- not all hear the gospel will want to receive Christ;
- of those who do follow Jesus Christ, not all will remain faithful through all their lives;
- some move away, and we lose touch with them;
- some are promoting a false gospel, and others ridicule it;
- BUT many are those who hear the good news of new life in Jesus Christ, who believe this gospel, who receive Jesus Christ into their lives, who follow him faithfully from that time forward.

Many parents know the heartbreak of raising up a child to know Jesus, to be a caring, loving person, to know right from wrong, to have positive values... and then see that child choose a lifestyle that is contrary to everything they've been taught. Does that mean that they shouldn't have bothered? Of course not! Far more grow up to hang on to those values and beliefs.

3) "There are only good children"

I'd like to tell you a story about the powerful effect parents can have on their children. It's also a story of how love and faith can heal even the most broken heart.

A young boy came to a home for delinquent boys and asked permission to become one of the residents. The director asked him, "Why should I let you in? What are your credentials?"

The boy replied, "I am the worst kid in my town. I am rotten to the core. If that ain't credentials enough, I don't know what is!"

With that, the director welcomed the boy in. You see, this was not just any group home. This was a whole settlement called "Boys' Town." The director was Edward Flanagan, a Roman Catholic priest who had a passion to save unwanted, unloved children from being destroyed by life on the streets. (He later had a hand in establishing a similar community called "Girls' Town.")

It is years ago that I read William Howells' book *Boys' Town*, which describes this incredible place. Father Flanagan had but one principle: all children are good; there is no such thing as a bad child.

They never expelled anyone from the community, no matter how much trouble they caused. But one time they came close. One particular boy who came from a terrible home loved to steal things from the other boys. No matter how he was punished, no matter how the

counsellors talked with him, no matter how the other boys warned him, it never changed him. Even in a community where unwanted children became family for each other, he was despised. He was causing such a disruption to the family atmosphere that he would have to leave.

Father Flanagan took him into his office to explain the consequences if his behaviour did not change. "Then just throw me out right now," the boy cried. "You keep on saying all the time that I'm a good boy. I'm not. I'm no good at all. I'm evil. What kind of a good boy would go around stealing, even from his friends?"

Father Flanagan was lost for words. Was this boy the proof that he was wrong in his beliefs? Then an idea struck him. "Tell me, what does a good boy do?"

"He does what is right. He obeys his parents. Or, in my case, he obeys you."

"Right! And ever since you were born, you were told to steal things. Your parents made you steal money from the store. You had to steal your clothes and steal your food. You are doing exactly what your parents told you to do. You are a good boy."

Father Flanagan continued, "What I want you to do is to listen to someone else. Listen to me now. I will tell you what is right. You *are* a good boy!"

The boy was speechless for a moment. Then he jumped off his chair and ran over to Father Flanagan. He buried his face in the priest's shoulder and sobbed and sobbed. And from that day he was a changed person.

Oh, my friends, what an awesome responsibility we have, and what a precious privilege we have in being parents. What a tremendous help we have in Jesus Christ. Thank God!

Next Steps:

- If you are a parent or grandparent: God bless you! You have an awesome responsibility, and a precious privilege.
- All of us: By our words and our example, let the light of Jesus shine in our lives. Be known as a person of God's love.