

## 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of 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 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. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. 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. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. 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, 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 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. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, 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. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Luke 17:5-6

The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' The replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you".

Prayer:

As we gather at the table of our Lord and drink the cup of the new covenant which was shed for the forgiveness of sins, make us mindful of our hurtful desires. Bless us with forgiving hearts. Amen.

## "Listening To Our Lives"



Mending Socks' by Archibald Motley, Jr.

In 587 B.C. the city of Jerusalem was bathing in blood. The day had dawned when Israel's God's had not protected the Holy City of Jerusalem from military conquest by the Babylonian empire. Yahweh's children had been killed. The 'cream of the crop' had been taken captive and forced to live in Babylonia. According to Old Testament scholars the atrocity precipitated a crisis of faith. Walter Brueggemann wrote: 'The political-military experience of an ending is effectively transposed into a deep theological crisis.' This disaster shook the people to their core (where trust in God lives) and drew from them questions, cries of anguish, and a thirst for vengeance. Where was God now? And who was going to do something about these wretched Babylonians? (The Word that Redescribes the World). Together, in their crisis of faith, the exiles wept and prayed and wrote down psalm 137 for posterity.

By the rivers of Babylon---

there we sat down and we wept when remembered Zion.

And so we hung up our harps, there upon the willows.

For there our captors asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,

"Sing us one of the song of Zion!"

How could we sing God's song in a foreign land?  
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!  
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.  
Remember, O God, against the Edomites  
the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said,  
"Tear it down! Tear it down, down to its foundations!"  
O holy city of Babylon, you devastator!  
Happy shall they be  
who pay you back what you have done to us!  
Happy shall they be  
who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

'Anger', Biblical scholar McCann writes, 'has to be vented and just as importantly, it has its place, ironically, as a good thing. The worst possible response to victimization would be to feel nothing. And that's why the psalms, as poems and prayers are so important, they voice those deepest most painful realities and trust that 'God loves us as we are' (Texts for Preaching Year C). Venting and sharing our anger is one thing, but what about the desire for blood vengeance? Here Walter Bruggemann notes: 'Humans, as Israel knows, do indeed thirst for vengeance, and that thirst is itself never censured. The faith question is how to manage that thirst. One may act out the thirst, deny it, or cede it to YHWH in prayer' (Reverberations of Faith)

In those days, the desire for blood vengeance was typically acted out in two ways. The first was the bloodiest. If one tribe, family, nation, or clan killed a member of the opposition, the victim's clan would reciprocate by killing as many of the enemy as possible. The second management strategy was attested to in Israel's scriptures. It's called, 'eye-for-an-eye'. The good thing about this is that it limited the blood bath. If one person was killed, then the offended tribe could only kill only one of the enemy in return. Biblical 'eye-for-an-eye' payback was also good for denying the thirst for vengeance by practicing a 'punishment must fit the crime' law of justice. For example, if a person stole something, the punishment might be to cut off his

hand rather than his head. Psalm 137 suggests that Jewish victims also sought religiously to manage their anguish and desire for vengeance by praying communal, voiced prayers of imagined satisfaction in which the bad guys get paid back in kind for the crimes that they had committed.

In Jesus' day it was the Roman Empire that was shedding the blood of infants. So I wonder what it was like for Jesus to pray this psalm of vengeance. When he breathed in the pain of grief and gave it up to the empathic heart of God, did trust in God's Love promise not to abandon him awaken in his soul? When he breathed in the fear of harm and gave it up to the compassionate heart of his Abba, did the Spirit of Courage breathe strength into his spirit? When he breathed out his human thoughts of 'eye for an eye' payback and gave it up to the Holy One who rights all wrongs, and knows the difference between vengeance and justice, did the Spirit of Truth enable Jesus to teach: 'You have heard it said, an eye for an eye' but I say to you. Do not resist an evil person - love your enemy - pray for those who persecute you? 'Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do' is the prayer that Jesus prayed as he suffered unto death on the cross. 'Forgive them for they know not what they do' was/is the human/Divine antidote for blood vengeance thirst. 'Forgive them' was/is the human/Divine spiritual power for disarming 'eye-for-an-eye' kind of justice thinking. 'Forgiving' was/is the human/Divine spiritual practice for breaking the cycle of blood violence.

Timothy was a third generation Christian suffering religious persecution. His grandmother Lois and mother Eunice had brought him up in Christian faith as taught to them by the apostle Paul. He knew about forgiveness and loving his enemy. But Timothy, as the letter suggests, was not feeling it. Cowardly fear and the shame of feeling powerless were lessening his self control over about 'eye for an eye' thinking and thirst for blood vengeance. So I wonder, did this letter of testimony about Christ Jesus, The Human One who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, help to rekindle the faith gift of forgiveness that was in him?