



Remember Your Mother

TEXT
2 Timothy 1:1-9a

May 8, 2016 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

In 1905, Anna Jarvis began a campaign to have Mother's Day recognized as an official holiday in this country.

In 1908, Congress rejected this idea, noting that if we did that, we would have to designate a "Mother-in-Law's Day" as well. But in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation declaring the second Sunday in May to be Mother's Day.

Anna Jarvis's pleasure soon turned to resentment as companies like Hallmark and Russell Stover began cashing in on the day. She said it should be a day of sentiment, not of profit, and in 1925, she organized a protest in Philadelphia. She was arrested for disturbing the peace. So, happy Mother's Day, and try not to get arrested.

Long before these official things, the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "remember your mother."

"I am reminded," he said, "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."

I don't know anything about these women other than their names. But I do know about mothers and grandmothers.

My grandmother Martha was a preacher's wife and a church school teacher. For over sixty years, she taught a Bible class at the Presbyterian church. It started out in a classroom, but it grew until the class moved to the chapel.

Every Saturday, she sat at the kitchen table reading her Bible, making her notes. My grandmother could quote the book. But still she studied it.

I remember one summer Saturday, she was studying, and I said, "You don't have to read that anymore; you already know what it says."

She told me, "Tom, this book has a way of showing you what you have never seen before, even if you are reading the most familiar parts. It took time, but I learned she is exactly right about that." Grandmothers can sometimes say things that stick with you.

In this letter, we find Paul pushing a few words through the prison bars to be carried to his son in the faith, Timothy.

Paul will die soon. He knows that. There are a few things he wants to say or say again, and his scraps of wisdom are found in this letter.

We can tell that Paul is worried about Timothy. Timo-

thy is experiencing a crisis in his faith. Paul says, "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." It sounds like Paul is not so sure.

Paul also says, "Do not be ashamed of me, Timothy. Do not be ashamed of my testimony to Jesus or of my imprisonment."

I don't think Paul would tell Timothy not to be ashamed unless Timothy was ashamed. Was Timothy ashamed of Paul because he was in prison? Was Timothy ashamed of himself because Paul was in prison and Timothy wasn't? Was Timothy ashamed of God because Paul was in prison?

I don't know. Faith can become fragile for lots of reasons — and sometimes for no reason at all. Finding God in this world is no easy thing. Trusting in God is no easy thing.

I bet you have times when you feel your faith is strong and other times when it is more fragile. We never completely escape the questions. It's not an accident that we end each sermon with "We believe, help our unbelief." Faith is not a constant. It is a living, evolving, sometimes elusive thing.

Timothy was in a faith crisis. I don't know why. But we do see what Paul encourages him to do: remember. Four times in four verses, Paul uses words that reflect remembering:

When I remember you in my prayers ... recalling your tears, I long to see you. ... I am reminded ... I remind you to rekindle the gift of God.

Over and over, Paul exhorts Timothy to remember. There is strength that comes from remembering.

I heard Ben Weir talk about this. Ben and his wife Carol were Presbyterian missionaries in the Middle East for 30 years. In 1984, he was taken hostage. He was held for 16 months. Much of that time, he was in isolation. He said what kept him sane — more than sane, what kept him hopeful during that time — was scripture. He didn't have a Bible with him, but it was scripture that he had in his head.

He remembered the Christmas stories. He remembered parables. When they brought him food, he would remember Jesus feeding the 5,000 or the Last Supper.

He would remember the letters of Paul, many of them written from prison: "Nothing separates us from the love of God." He held on to these words like gifts from another time to remind him that the particular storm that he was in would end, and in time, he would rise above it.

What would you remember of God when you are struggling? I would encourage you

sometime — and I'm serious about this: Take a piece of paper and write down what you remember of scripture. Write down hymns that you remember. Write down what you remember, and then fold that paper and carry it with you for a while. I think you will find that it gives you strength. Remembering is a sacrament. It gives us strength.

But Paul did not instruct Timothy simply to remember. Paul said, *Remember your mother and her faith ... your grandmother Lois and her faith. And remember when I laid my hands on you.* "Laying on of hands" could be a reference to ordination or perhaps to baptism — certainly one or the other.

We will baptize some folks today. Most of them are children. Most of them will not remember it, so we will need to tell them.

A couple summers ago, Carol and I took our children on a vacation in South Carolina. Some wonderful friends shared their place with us there. One day we drove up from the beach to Columbia, to the Seven Oaks Church where I served for about six years. That was the place where my children were baptized. We walked into the sanctuary. It was a Tuesday afternoon, and no one was there. We told them the story of their baptism. Sarah cried like she was being tortured. Nathan was baptized by my colleague. It was her first baptism, and she forgot part of the liturgy. It was just perfect though.

Paul says it's important to remember the moments when God has been in your life. Remember the faith that lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice. Paul knows remembering the people in your life that have showed you what it is to follow Jesus will give you strength.

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a Lutheran pastor and national speaker and writer. She's no ordinary Lutheran. She has more tattoos than hair. She writes honestly, although she is very comfortable using language so profane she might get kicked out of the Navy.

She grew up in a Church of Christ. They were folks who taught her early that, as a girl, she was not equipped to be a pastor. Women didn't do that. Women could teach children. But when the boys became middle-school age, well, men needed to take over the teaching. Everyone knows that women are to be silent in church. She learned that early.

After a long and often destructive road, she began to sense that, contrary to the church of her childhood, God was calling her to ministry.

She went home to tell her parents that she thought she was called to be a pastor. She said, "At that moment, my father silently stood up, walked to the bookshelf and took down his worn, leather-bound Bible.

"Here we go," I thought, "he's going to beat me with the scripture stick.

"He opened it up. My father did not read about 'women be-

ing silent in church.’ He read from Esther. From my father, I heard these words: ‘But you were born for such a day as this.’ He closed the book, and my mother joined him in embracing me. They prayed over me and they gave me a blessing. Some blessings, like the one my conservative Christian parents gave to their soon-to-be-Lutheran pastor daughter who had put them through hell, are the kind of blessings that stay with you for the rest of your life. The kind you can’t speak of without crying all over again.”¹

Paul says, “Remember your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and the faith that lived in them.” I don’t know anything else about either of these women. But I do know something about mothers and grandmothers.

My mother was in church every Sunday — teaching Sunday school, directing children’s choirs. And in those years when I didn’t want to go, she communicated with great clarity that she couldn’t care less whether I wanted to go or not. I was going!

The year I went to seminary, my mother did too. But where I really saw her faith was after she had her stroke. It disabled her at 54 years of age. I was still in my 20s when I became my mother’s parent. She had faced more than a few storms in her life; she remained at peace most of those years.

She moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, a few years back. Both my brother and

sister lived there. She had been in the same zip code with Carol and me for 23 years, so it was a big change for her. The day I told her that she was going to move to Raleigh, she said, “Oh, Honey, I don’t know about that.”

I said, “Mom, you will love it. Both Martha and Jim are there, and you like them more than you like me.”

She said, “That’s true, but I’ll miss Carol.”

I said, “Well, maybe Carol will come visit you.”

“That will be fine then.”

It looks like this will be the last Mother’s Day for my mom. And she is teaching me still. She is at peace; and if you ask her, she will tell you she’s just waiting on the angels. When they come, they will not have to say what they usually do: “Do not be afraid” — because she’s not afraid.

On weeks when I find the mixture of my life more unbelief than belief, I take Paul’s advice and I remember. This faith is too big for any of us to hold on to it all the time. So in those moments like Timothy finds himself in, it’s important to remember those in our life who will hold on to faith for us.

It’s a good day for that.

Remember the people who have taught you what it means to follow Jesus Christ. For some, your mother will be on the list. There will be others on that list as well.

Remember all those saints in our families or our church families, or even those through

the ages who have taught us what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

It’s important to remember them any time, but particularly when you need to rekindle the gift of God that is within you.

¹Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Pastrix* (2013), pp. 17–18

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church’s website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.