



Remember

TEXT
2 Timothy 1:3–7

March 22, 2020 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

Ben and Carol Weir were Presbyterian missionaries for probably 30 years.

In the mid-1980s, they served as teachers at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon. In 1985, Ben was taken hostage. He was held hostage for sixteen months, most of that time in solitary confinement. To keep from being crushed by anxiety, he counted his blessings: his glasses weren't broken, apricot jam on a sandwich, the song of birds he could hear outside, periodic kindnesses by his guards. But mostly what kept him sane was singing hymns he had memorized and remembering the stories of scripture.¹

He remembered how God brought manna to a lost people in the wilderness, and how from the lion's den, Daniel prayed a prayer of thanksgiving, and how from the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed the same. He remembered how Paul, in prison like Ben was, continued to rejoice, and how from prison Paul and Silas sang hymns at midnight. And he remembered those faithful women who were the first preachers to declare: "He is risen." He said remembering these stories kept him sane — for he

knew that even as he had no idea where he was, God knew, and God would be his Savior.

When times are challenging, memory can be our friend. That's Paul's instruction.

Timothy was a friend of Paul's. Paul calls Timothy his son in the faith. They love each other, but Timothy is having a faith crisis of some sort. Paul speaks of Timothy's tears, and how Paul wants to help.

I don't know what caused Timothy's heartbreak, but I know it's a common place for us to live. Everyone faces challenges, and when we do, sometimes it rocks our faith a bit. That's what happens with Timothy. Whatever the troubles in his life were, it caused a faith crisis.

We all face that at times. Finding God in this world is no easy thing. Trusting in God is no easy thing.

But when Timothy is having a faith crisis, Paul gives him some really good advice. Paul says, *Remember Lois your grandmother, and remember Eunice your mother. Remember how their faith lived in them.*

They were obviously strong women. They were probably the ones who loved Timothy into faith. But you can also be

sure that they had their own struggles. Everyone does. So, what Timothy would remember is how these women faced difficult times, and how their faith lived in them.

I know this to be true: There are some aspects of God that only come into view for us when we are in trouble. Sometimes it is in the midst of the storm that the presence of God can be most profound. That was Ben Weir's story. When he was isolated for 16 months, it was remembering the stories of his faith that carried him through.

That's what Paul is telling Timothy. *Don't feel so strong right now? Remember Eunice, remember Lois ... remember how their faith lived in them. They will give you strength.*

I know what it is to see faith live in someone ... just one story. I had only been a pastor for about three years when I met my friend Tracy. I was with her parents when Tracy died. She was just 17. Leukemia attacked not only her body, but also the heart of her entire family. The time came to turn off the machines. We gathered around her bed, and we read from Revelation: *There will be no more crying and no more death. We read, I will come again and take you to myself.*

Tracy's daddy held her lifeless hand. When it comes to being a daddy of a little girl, we never know what to do. We never know what to say. Daddies are at a loss more times than not. We just know we would do anything to protect them. We would do anything to protect them.

But she died while he held her hand. And with his heart spilling over with grief, he said, "Tom, I was so afraid that when this moment came, I might not trust in God. I feared that the hurt would be too much, and I just couldn't believe. But it's strange. I do trust that God will take care of her when I can't. Because I love her too much to let death take her away. Surely God loves her as much as I do. Surely God is taking care of her now."

It's been, gosh, over 25 years, but when I want to remember how faith lives in someone, I think of that moment.

When times are hard, memory can be your friend.

Remember the testimony of the scriptures. Remember the stories of the ordinary saints like Ben and Carol Weir and like Tracy's family.

You may have a story of your own. Maybe you are recalling a time that was hard, when grief of some nature was close, and God brought you through. You may have a story like that.

In my e-note on Friday, I invited you to share stories like that with me. Many of you emailed me what came to your mind and heart. I have been grateful to read them, and inspired by your strength that

comes from God's grace. If you haven't done so and would like to, I would welcome that. Or maybe you want to give thanks for someone you are remembering who has inspired you.

I'm thinking of my friend Dean. He's a pastor with a kind heart. He was visiting a member of his congregation who was dying. It was a painful death — nothing sweet about it. Dean's friend said, "I'm afraid, and I'm not strong, and my faith is weak. I don't even know what to pray."

Dean said, "That's OK, my faith is strong enough for both of us right now. You lean on my faith."

That's what Paul knows. Timothy, I don't know the circumstances, but his faith was not strong. Paul, from prison, says, *Timothy, if you don't feel strong right now, remember Eunice, Lois, me. Lean on us.*

But know this: We are not alone. Let your faith live in you, and if that feels hard, then remember those in your life whose faith has lived in them. It will give you strength.

¹Ben and Carol Weir, *Hostage Bound, Hostage Free* (1987)

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>.