



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Ancient Future 2 Timothy 1:3-7 Dr. Jeff Roberts May 3, 2009

The late Robert Weber coined the term “Ancient Future” to describe an emerging worship style at the turn of this new century. While there were many worship leaders trying to help congregations as they waded through the conflicts, which were arising from the seeming clash of contemporary and traditional worship styles, Weber discovered a new trend in young adults: the longing for depth that was lacking in some contemporary worship services and relevancy which was lacking in traditional services. Weber’s approach was what he called “Ancient Future.” It was the recapturing of ancient forms of worship and liturgy, while at the same time, incorporating the best of contemporary music, and movements in worship. This was more than a blended form of worship where as one minister of music friend of mine said, “You try and offend everyone one time each week in worship.” It was a new way forward. It was taking the past and the present to discover a way forward.

As I have thought about Dr. Weber’s idea of Ancient Future Worship, I think this might apply not only to the way we worship but also to the way we view our faith and our church. Maybe there is a lesson to be learned from Dr. Weber’s life’s work that will help us enrich and deepen our faith, while at the same time, find a way forward to be relevant to an ever-changing culture.


Paul’s words to the young Timothy might be translated as a commentary on an ancient future way of faith. The seasoned missionary pastor was instructing his son in the ministry, Timothy. Timothy had joined Paul and Silas on Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul had discovered Timothy when he returned to the area of Iconium and Lystra. This region was one of the last places Paul and Barnabas

went on Paul’s first missionary journey. It was the place of great conflict and the place where Paul was stoned and left for dead outside the city. However, Paul’s courage and work had not gone unnoticed by those who had come to faith. By the time Paul arrived back in the region on his second journey, there was a thriving church in each of the cities; not only was the church thriving, but there was a multi-generational church emerging. Households had come to faith and faith was being passed from one generation to another. When Paul and Silas arrived in Lystra and Iconium the followers of Jesus were speaking highly of a young man in their number and his name was Timothy. Timothy would leave with Paul and Silas to begin a journey of a lifetime.

When Paul wrote these words to young Timothy, Timothy was in Ephesus trying to give some stability to a church that had fallen on hard times. You might say Timothy was the intentional interim. Paul had gone on to Crete, but he had left Timothy behind because the church desperately needed stability. Paul was writing to Timothy to instruct him in regards to the nature of the church, its leadership, and to encourage Timothy in his times of trial.

Paul reminded Timothy of his legacy of faith and that the same faith that lived in Timothy’s family, now lived in him and that he was to fan into flame his gifts and to remain faithful to the task that God had given him.

In this introduction and encouragement to Timothy, I think we find several instructions that define for us what it means to live an Ancient Fu-



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ture faith. First, there is a genuine appreciation for the faith which has been passed to us. Paul's words of thanksgiving are for the faith that he shared with his own ancestors and the faith that had been passed down to Timothy.

Paul wrote "I thank God whom I serve as my forefathers did with a clear conscience." Paul is reminding us that he stands on the faith of his own forefathers. Now Paul's forefathers were Jews; yet, he determined that although they had not known Jesus as the Christ, their faith was sincere and their teaching him their faith had prepared him to receive Jesus when he met Him on the Damascus road. So, with a clear conscience Paul now had his own genuine and authentic faith. In the same way, Timothy had received his faith through his faithful ancestors; first, through the faith of his grandmother Lois and then through his mother Eunice. Timothy was a child of a Jewish woman and a Greek father. Timothy was blessed because even though Eunice had married a gentile, her faith had not been compromised. She had taught Timothy her faith so that when they all heard of Jesus the Messiah, they were prepared to receive Jesus as their Lord.

The people with Ancient Future Faith have a genuine thankfulness for the faith that has been passed on to them. We show this appreciation in several ways in our lives.

First, we have a deep understanding that our faith is the result of others. Many of us are studying the book of Acts, chapter by chapter, on Wednesday nights. One of the things we have noted is how Luke introduced the next person in the story of the church's expansion. As Luke told the story of the beginning and expansion of the church, he would introduce a new character in the church's development, and then tell the story of their significance. What we have noted in our study is that one person's prominence in the church is significant for a period of time, and then someone else would rise to leadership. One person would take the gospel to one place, and then someone else emerged to take the next step. I have been reminding us all that we are part of this story from Acts; we are the next characters to be introduced to the story of the church and the gospel. We all have our parts to play in the sharing and expansion of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we must never forget those whose stories and chapters have come and gone. We stand on their shoulders. We are indebted to their faithfulness.

In many ways that is what today is all about. Baptist Heritage Sunday is a yearly reminder that there are saints in our midst. There are those who have been faithful in their moment. They taught a Sunday School

class, they served as a deacon, they drove a bus for youth trips, they cared for babies in the nursery, they led in worship, and they sacrificed financially to construct this incredible campus. They dreamed and followed a vision of God's activity in this place. We must develop a true appreciation for the saints of the past.

For us individually there have been those who have paved the way for us. Many of us grew up in homes where the church was central to life. We might have complained that Mom and Dad made us go to church every time the doors opened, but now we are grateful. Many of us have never known a time in our lives when we did not know that God loved us and Jesus died for us. We are truly the blessed people on this earth. There are billions of people who have lived and died and never known this story; they have never had the opportunity to know that God's love has a name and that name is Jesus.

If you were blessed like me to have such an experience, then we really do have much to be grateful for when it comes to the faith passed on to us. Yet, we all have a story to tell. Everyone who comes to Jesus comes as the result of faithful followers who have come and gone. There are stories we will never know that are responsible for us coming to faith. There are those whom we will never know; they were faithful in their moment and somehow, God used them to bring us to faith. The Ancient Future Faith has a deep appreciation for those who have been faithful.

There is another characteristic of this approach to faith. It has a present responsibility. Paul told the young preacher that because he had received this faith from those who had come before him, he must take the responsibility to "fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." Paul was referring to the moment when Timothy's gifts for ministry were recognized, and Paul's laying on of hands was an outward blessing of these gifts in Timothy's life.

I can remember working as a camp counselor in the Smokey Mountains one summer. This was a very primitive camp, and on the last night the week we would take the boys up on the mountain near the camp. There we would camp in shelters we created and eat food we would cook over an open fire. We were given three matches to use to start our fires; we would gather tender wood and try our best to use that one match to start the fire, then slowly we would add to the tender wood bigger and bigger pieces of wood. Many times I would find myself laying flat on the ground blowing the embers ever so lightly to get the flame to return. In the beginning of that fire, every moment was important and every decision was important. You could put too large of a piece of wood on the flame and smother it, or you could

fail to provide the wood for fuel for the fire and it would go out because there was not enough wood. The process took energy, wisdom and time. So it is when we fan the flame of the gift given to us. That is what it means to be responsible in the present with our calling. It takes energy, wisdom and time.


Timothy had the responsibility now to fan into flame his gift for ministry. The term Paul used is a very vivid term. It is the action of fanning hot embers back into a blazing fire. This is not to suggest that Timothy's spiritual fire had died, but that there was now a responsibility for Timothy to be faithful. With vigor, he was going to have to take the gift of faith and put it to use.

Paul reminded him how this was to be done. First, it is not something we do with timidity. When it is our turn to be faithful, it is not time for being afraid, thinking we cannot do it, or finding excuses not to be faithful – just the opposite. In the present moment what God is calling on each of us to do is to fan the flame of faith with vigor in our own lives and step up with the confidence that God has called us for this moment and time.

There is no time for timidity; instead, what God needs is a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. All of these qualities were what Timothy needed to be an effective pastor. He had to be bold as a leader: he had to have a sense of his calling to this task, so he could lead with a confidence not so much in his self but in God's call on his life. He needed love: the kind of love here is someone who cares for others, is able to oppose difficult people without seeking revenge, and offers grace and love in return for opposition. Timothy was the pastor of a splintered and difficult church. He would have to show grace and love toward everyone, including those who opposed him. He would have to be self-disciplined, in order to remain focused on God's call on his life.

All of these traits are necessary for us to be responsible in our moment of faithfulness. We come to this present moment as Christians and as a church and we can be genuinely thankful for the past. However, that is not enough for this day; we must adopt these qualities for our faith. We must be bold in our faith. Maybe more than ever, what the church needs is boldness. We cannot adopt a spirit of timidity in this day. We must have a confidence in what God has called us to do as indi-

viduals and as a church. We must learn to truly love those who would oppose the gospel in our culture. We cannot view our enemies as enemies but as those loved by God. We must believe deeply that love – not hate – wins. There are even those in our culture who would enjoy the destruction and fall of Christianity, but only we can truly destroy our faith by not choosing to love and show grace like Jesus. No matter what the opposition, our moment in time calls for the power of love. It calls for self-discipline. The church is tempted to go in so many directions these days. In our attempt to seem relevant, we are tempted to adopt priorities which are not our priorities. The church must remain focused on the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



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The same is true for us as individuals. God has gifted each of us and now is not the time for timidity. Now is the time to be bold in using your gifts. Now is the time to be confident in your calling. Now is the time to express love to others and now is the time to stay focused. Too many times we try to be all things to all people. What has God called you to do? Whatever that is, remain focused on that calling; set priorities in your life that reflects that calling. In this way you will fan into flame the gift in your life. In this way, we will be responsible in the present.

Yet, an Ancient Future Faith is more than recognizing the past and being responsible in the present; it is also about creating a faith for the future.

The terms I love in this text are these phrases: “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded now lives in you also.” The words that spring from the text to me are the words “lived”, “lives” and “also.” There is recognition of the past, the present and then some sense of a combination of the two with the word also. It was a shared faith and a faith that was lived, is living and will live.

As we receive the past and are responsible with the present, the result is a faith that will live. Will this faith be the same as it was in the past? Yes and no. It will be the same because it is genuine or sincere. That is, it is a true faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel does not change. We come to faith in Jesus the same way the first disciples came to Jesus. It is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for our sins and rose again. It is God's love and forgiveness that brings us salvation.

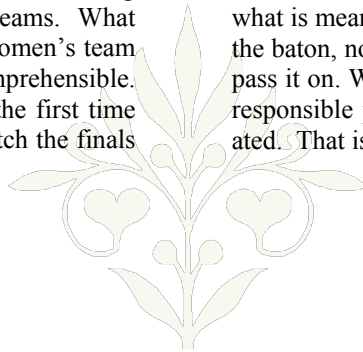
Nothing has changed in 2000 years in regards to the gospel of Jesus. Yet, how it lives within us and is lived out through us will always change as our world changes. To take the past and be responsible in the present creates the opportunity for us to be effective in the future. We take the timeless gospel into a temporary world, and this gospel lives in us and will live in those to come. Our children will be faced with new issues and new opposition to the gospel but because we were faithful with the past and the present, they will be ready to live the gospel for their day.

It was hard to believe and harder to watch the preliminaries of the 4x100 yard relay at the Beijing Olympics in August 2008. First, it was the men who may have not been favored to win the gold would have been in medal contention. In a gesture that is as natural for these runners as breathing, the men dropped the baton. As it fell on the ground and bounced on the track, years of preparation and expectation came to a screeching halt, just like the men's Olympic medal dreams. What was unbelievable was that the American women's team did the same thing; it was almost incomprehensible. The women failed to reach the finals for the first time since 1948. Both teams would have to watch the finals

and think about what could have been. For them, it was a simple act which was practiced over and over again. Sometimes the simple acts become so common place that we forget how important and critical a moment really is. In each baton pass there is great danger and yet great opportunity. It is true that in the baton pass, races are won and lost.

That is what Ancient Future Faith is about: the baton being passed. If we fail to recognize the faith of those in the past, we might not be ready to receive the baton. If we are not faithful in the present, then we might not be worthy of passing the baton ourselves. But if we will live with gratitude for the saints of the past and if we are responsible in the present, then the baton will be passed again, then faith in Jesus Christ lives.

Every week in this place batons are being passed. Every day in our homes batons are being passed. Every moment faith is being lived, is living and will live. That is what is meant by an Ancient Future Faith. Let us not drop the baton, not when we receive it or when it is our time to pass it on. When the faithfulness of the past is met with a responsible present, the possibility of living faith is created. That is what we owe the future: a living faith. ❁



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