

## “Remembrance and Continuance”

2 Timothy 3:10-13 (NRSV)

**Elie Wiesel**, one of the few teenage survivors of the horrors of Auschwitz, wrote, “**Memory is a blessing**. It creates bonds rather than destroys them. Bonds between present and past, between individuals and groups.... What would the future of [humankind] be if it were devoid of memory? (From the Kingdom of Memory, 1995). **Memory** is important to those who have gone through terrible times, for it can be restorative, as well as disturbing. It is also important to those of us who have experienced wonderful times, for good memories can also bring hope and healing. In that way, **memory** is important to those of us who have found lifelong friends, and also to those who have lost them. **Memory** is important to people of faith and to people who are still searching for answers. **Memory** is important to individuals and nations, to families and larger groups. **Memory** is what keeps history alive. It is also what can push us on to new hopes and dreams for the future.

**As I look back over my life**, I can clearly see how my Christian upbringing at home, my experiences with and exposure to certain people during my teenage and young adult years, and my university training, first in English literature and then in theology, decisively set my attitudes toward the gospel and the Christian ministry. Shortly after I began my university studies I was introduced to Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, a campus group, which existed for the purpose of helping young people to come to a living experience of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, as well as helping them to find ways to integrate their secular and spiritual learning. Inter Varsity leaders and books helped me to find university level answers to my university-sized questions. They also helped me to have an abiding passion for evangelism, to be keen to lead others to the same saving, transforming faith in Christ which I saw in my friends and found rekindled in myself.

There were **mentors** in this process. Among them were my minister, **the Rev. W. F. (Bill) Duffy**, a product of Inter Varsity, was one. His preaching of the Bible was thoughtful, warm and relevant. **Dave Ward**, a young Anglican, Inter Varsity staff person, was another. His passion for the gospel in the university context caught my attention and my heart. Also, my professor of English, **Dr. Douglas Wurtele**, a fine medievalist, who also happened to have a heart for God, from whom I took several courses, taught me much about the rich Christian heritage in English language and literature.

Of course, **I was impressionable then**. Who isn't during those years? Thank God for a little impressionability! I'm sure the impressions I gained at that time were heightened by my having truly "put my own mind and heart in gear" – as I phrased it then -- about the Christian faith. You see, after having lived my faith on the basis of my parents' influence, I had now made the gospel my own and I wanted God's way and God's will in my life. At the bottom of all this, I can see in retrospect, was God's guiding hand in bringing all those wonderful people and influences into my life.

Over the years, these remembrances have fueled my continuance in the gospel. There is a **powerful link between remembrance and continuance**. Such connections are a part of God's way of working in our lives. Many older Christians are sustained by similar remembrances, some of which extend back many years. Certain names and events from their spiritually formative years will regularly surface in their conversations. Similarly, the memories of youth groups or camp will stand disproportionately tall in many young lives for the next fifty to sixty years – beckoning their own continuance in the gospel.

**Timothy's continuance in the apostolic ministry** was a vital concern of Paul in the Pastoral Letters. And it is the main concern of his words to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10-17 -- which has as its central imperative the word "**continue**" in verse 14: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it." Paul grounds this call to continuance on two things – first, **in remembering the past** (vv 10-13), second, **in focusing on the Scriptures** (vv 14-17). In this sermon I will take up the first part, which exhorts Timothy to **continue in his calling to remember** how Paul lived.

### 1. **Remember my life** (2 Tim. 3:10).

When **Barack Obama** ran for president, he often recalled incidents from his mother's life, or from his maternal grandparents' lives. Although he had some appreciation of his father's and his Kenyan roots, he declared it was the lifestyle and virtues of those who stuck by him, through thick and thin, which influenced him to be the man he was today. In similar fashion, in contrast to the phony lives and the so-called Christian "ministries" of certain false teachers, **the apostle Paul** issued an emphatic call to Timothy to **remember his apostolic lifestyle and virtues**: "You have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my steadfastness ..." (3:10).

The language behind the opening phrase, “You have observed ...” suggests **a deep intimacy**. The literal meaning is, “You’ve followed alongside...”; “You’ve accompanied me....” According to a commentator, “[This phrase] is also a technical term defining the relationship of a disciple to his master and can be paraphrased ‘study at close quarters,’ follow in spirit,’ ‘carefully note with a view to reproducing,’ and so ‘take as an example’” (p. 198).

Paul was challenging Timothy to recall the deep **master-disciple intimacy** that had begun between them with Timothy’s own deepening of faith during Paul’s missionary visit to Lystra in Asia Minor (Acts 16:1-3). Although Timothy had grown up in a Christian household through the godly influence of his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), Paul had become central in his world. Paul had helped him to be more assertive in his faith. He’d identified some gifts for ministry in him. He’d been present for his ordination to the Christian ministry (2 Tim. 1:6-7). And ever since, Timothy had literally walked alongside Paul (Acts 16:4ff), studying his every move in varied circumstances, in a number of diverse cultures. He’d seen Paul challenged and he’d seen and heard his responses. And he had observed that Paul’s life matched his teaching.

So Paul confidently affirmed **Timothy was intimately acquainted with him, his life and his lifestyle** – as he termed it, “**my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life ...**” (3:10a). Unlike the false teachers, **Paul’s “conduct” or “way of life” (NIV) corroborated and confirmed his teaching**. Indeed, in his first letter to Timothy, he’d commanded his young protégé to be sure that his teaching and way of life matched: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers” (4:16). That command had a bite to it, because Timothy saw that Paul walked his talk.

In addition, **Paul’s life was infused with purpose**. He had an “**aim in life.**” His life wasn’t aimless, as some lives are. His was a “purpose-driven life.” One of **Charles Schulz’s Peanuts** cartoons memorably portrays Snoopy coming to terms with purposelessness. Linus has just thrown a stick for Snoopy to retrieve. The dog’s first instinct was to do what he was accustomed to doing – to chase the stick. But he paused for a few moments and decided against it, thinking, “I want people to have more to say about me after I’m gone than ‘He was a nice guy ... He chased sticks.’” Paul never merely chased sticks. He was single-minded about the most important things, like the gospel, the well-tempered life, and Christ’s glory.

As the remembrance of Paul's way of life, teaching and purpose rose on Timothy's horizon, it was hoped he would be elevated in its continuance.

Alongside his life and lifestyle, **Paul raised the memory of his virtues – “my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness ...”** (3:10b). There was no ego in this. He was near the end of his life and ministry, and he desired with all his heart that Timothy should carry on. These virtues were simple fact.

Someone sent me a card with a sampler from 1824 with a wise bit of poetry about **virtue** on it:

Virtue's the chiefest beauty of the mind,  
The noblest ornament of humankind;  
Virtue's our safeguard and our guiding star,  
That stirs up reason when our senses err.

**Faith, patience, love and steadfastness are cardinal Christian virtues.**

Think only of Paul's famous triad: “And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).

“**Steadfastness**” or “**endurance**” (NIV), often portrayed by the symbol of an anchor, could stand for hope in this list because it naturally leads to hanging in there in spite of what happens in the context of the next subject, persecution (Fee, p. 186, 276). The unusual virtue inserted here is “**patience**” thus perhaps giving it special significance. “Timothy, remember my faith, love and endurance, and especially my patience.”

It's like the story told by **a grandfather** of his three-year-old **grandchild**. They went fishing. Now Joshua was, shall we say, very active. So the grandfather was constantly telling him, “Now Joshua, you have to sit down and be very patient.” Every few minutes Joshua would say, “I'm being patient, huh, Grandpa?” When strangers went by in their boats, Joshua would yell out, “I'm being very patient!” It all came to an end when Joshua offered his pole to his grandfather, “Here, Grandpa, you be patient for a while for the both of us.”

Paul was patient because he was fishing for much bigger fish, the souls of other people. The word here means **patience with people**. You know the phrase, “Please be patient with me, God's not finished with me yet.”

These **four virtues** of faith – toward God, love – toward all people, patience – especially toward the difficult, and steadfastness – to the end (Fee, p. 276) – were actually brilliantly showcased in the old apostle’s life.

The warm remembrance of specific examples of these virtues must have flashed beautifully, if not enduringly, in Timothy’s mind, and they drew him “up and away” to his own faithful continuance in ministry.

## 2. **Remember my persecutions** (2 Tim. 3:11).

With Timothy’s memory activated, Paul also recalls his experience – some of it shared by Timothy -- of “**my persecutions and suffering**, the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra [Timothy’s home town]. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord saved me from them all” (3:11). It was **only a partial, modest list**. Paul could have recalled other instances we know Timothy certainly observed – say in Philippi (Acts 16:19-38), or in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:1-11), or in Rome (Php. 1:12-18). But he chose to appeal to “sufferings that surrounded Timothy’s origins” (Fee, p. 277). Apparently, in calling him to continue his work, Paul’s purpose was to concentrate particularly on the “persecution and suffering” that must have left an indelible impression on the young man.

The Bible tells us Paul had been driven by persecution from Antioch (Acts 13:50); he had to flee from Iconium when a plot to lynch him was uncovered (Acts 14:5-6); and Timothy was in Lystra when Paul was stoned. Rocks had been hurled at Paul’s body, striking him so hard, he fell, blood-spattered and broken, beneath the rubble. Uncaring, those with murderous intent thought he was dead, and walked away, leaving his body to his followers, who must have also been sure he was gone. What grieving must have taken place! But, suddenly, Paul popped one eye open, and then the other. “It’s all right, brothers and sisters! No funeral today! Let’s get out of here!” And then, “he got up and went back into the city” (Acts 14:20). What joy! What a memory that must have been for Timothy! How these things must have played and replayed in the young man’s mind and heart.

“**What persecutions I endured!**” (3:11b). What an incentive for faithful continuance! How big do you think this shared history – “Antioch, Iconium and Lystra” – was in Timothy’s sky? It was like a rising planet in the heavens. He never forgot it.

Fortunately, **we do not yet see persecution and suffering** like this in Abbotsford or other parts of North America. But I have seen men and women and young people stand up for their faith and the truth when it cost them dearly. And, just this past week, interestingly enough, I met with **Pastor Emmanuel** and his wife, **Bushra Cheema**, Pakistani Presbyterians, who have suffered a great deal for their faith in the city of Lahore where they were having great success in evangelizing Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs that they had to flee their country. Now they have started a small “Asia Christian Church” in one of our Presbyterian churches in Surrey and they would like to become ministers in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. What persecutions Christians do and will endure!

True, there was **positive recollection** as well – “Yet,” says Paul, “the Lord rescued me from them all” (3:11c). This is a near quotation of Psalm 34:19 where King David celebrates his deliverance from his enemies and “the afflictions of the righteous.” The only way Paul was going to get release from prison was by going to his death, and he was at peace with that. But God had rescued him time and time again, which meant that God would probably do it for Timothy as well if he willed to do so. Actually, God always rescues his people – either in this life or by taking us to heaven! Therefore, Paul’s final rescue would be the best of all.

### 3. **Remember this axiom** (2 Tim. 3:12-13).

Fittingly, Paul gave Timothy a spiritual axiom to remember. It was appropriate for him and is appropriate for us as well. **“Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ...”** (3:12). That’s the way it will be for all Christians. After all, said Jesus, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And he went on to spell it out in case we missed what he meant: “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12). Life as active, witnessing Christians will not be a piece of cake. Jesus, the very “mystery of godliness himself” (1 Tim. 3:16) gave this truth classic expression: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘Servants are not greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you....’” (Jn. 15:20a). Count on it, folks, sooner or later.

It may first come in subtle forms of rejection – being ignored, being patronized, a mocking look, condescension. It will hurt, as **St. Augustine** explained, “Even when no one molests or vexes their body, they suffer this persecution ... in their hearts” (Thomas C. Oden, p. 167).

I’m sure Timothy knew all this. But to hear it from Paul again in the period just before his imminent passing from the scene was bracing. This was reality, and the acceptance of it placed Timothy on solid ground for what was to come. Such reality will also stand us well in the battles we must face today and tomorrow. Our culture flees suffering, seeing nothing noble in it or beyond it. But Christians must expect it in the regular course of living our lives and serving God, and those who do will stand strong.

In case the readers of Paul’s letter to Timothy didn’t get it, there was another part to the axiom: **“But wicked people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived”** (3:13).

Thankfully, Timothy got it; he took it to heart, and finished well.

So may we remember and continue and finish well too.

Amen

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