

The message given by Rev. Dr. Tom Zoelzer on Sunday, June 21, 2009 based on 2 Timothy 1:1-10

Giving Testimony

In 1994, I was serving a suburban congregation outside the city of Milwaukee. As Father's Day approached, one of the 30 something women of the congregation asked if she could speak at worship, and this is what she said -

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In looking for guidance for my own parenting skills, I have asked myself what I admired in their parenting. Both Mom and Dad gave me the feeling that there was nothing I could not do if I tried. Academic excellence fell into that category. If I came home with a 92 on a test, my Dad would be there to say why didn't you get 100? Some people might think that this would encourage children to think they weren't good enough but in our family I think it gave the message "I know you are smart. I know you could have gotten a 100 on that test. A 92 is OK, there is nothing wrong with a 92 but keep trying.

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the kind of man to put up with the Mickey Mouse stuff that often goes with being in charge of a group, but he was willing to give his time because of the interest that my brother and I had.

Mom has really developed the feeling of following my interests with confidence. She has been an excellent role model. I am always amazed when I go to their house and see all her projects. She is so crafty, so talented. If she sees something she would like to do, she figures out a way to make it. She instilled creativity in me. Her artistic talents have always been an important part of her mental health. She knows that physical health is as important as mental health. I remember her jumping rope on a frequent basis and then letting us know how long she jumped rope that day. And now she has 1315 miles of swimming to her name. Physical fitness is important, and she has followed this interest with confidence, just as creativity is important to her and she has pursued it with confidence.

The things that I remember about their parenting ability are not what they bought us, or the material things in our environment, but the time and fun they shared with us. Things like, going to the farm together, watching TV together on Sunday nights while dining on hamburgers, canoe trips, camping, family vacations, visiting relatives, and going to church on a regular basis whether we wanted to or not. I remember Dad reading chapters of Black Beauty to my brother and I, the birthday party I had that Dad put root beer in the beer dispenser, and on Christmas Eve, when all were in the car and ready to go, Mom would always forget something and then on the way home from Church, when we just couldn't wait to get

home, Dad would insist on driving through the neighborhood to look at lights. I remember Mom putting me to bed every night with a story or a song and always a reassuring blow by blow description of what would happen the next day.

I appreciate the fact that they taught us right from wrong, respect of others, and responsibility. I'm glad they gave us a sense of humor. They showed us that the family unit is very important, but still treated each of us as individuals. What I also appreciate is the things I would not think of right away, but now as a parent realize don't just happen. Things like the clean house we had to live in, clean clothes to wear, good food on the table, a mom who made my lunch to take to school, and usually willing chauffeurs.

So my prayer today would be that my children will have as wonderful a childhood as I did. May all the grandchildren live on in the tradition of confidence, creativity, capability and loving parents.

Wow! What a testimony! Well, happy parent day everyone – especially to the Dad's here today! It's Father's Day in the United States, and it is a special day to honor the person we call "Dad." I know that for some, "Dad" was not a positive force in your life, and many still carry the physical and emotional scars of that experience. I grieve this reality for anyone and pray for God's healing hand for healing of those scars.

However, for many, "Dad" is a positive force. Men today have many ambitions and responsibilities, and I want to give praise to those who take their parent responsibility seriously. Today I give testimony to the importance of fatherhood.

I would like to give testimony to what I see today: First of all, I would like to say to the men who are actively raising children today that I compliment you on your parenting. Up to about 40 years ago, men seemed to take a hands off, secondary role in parenting behind the other person in the house. But the men I observe today are more directly involved in child raising. They are changing diapers and taking their turn in watching their children and getting them to their activities. They view child raising as a partnership with their spouse, and they are doing their part. They take parenting seriously and are trying to balance work, family, and personal time, and I am impressed. Study after study indicates that children have a better childhood and are more prepared for adulthood when both parents are actively involved in their life. So congratulations Dads and keep giving your time, energy, and presence!

One of the best examples of fatherhood I read one time was an article where a man reported that for his birthday one year as a youth his father gave him a card with 365 markers in it. The card explained that each marker represented one hour of his Dad's time every day. The card said that life gets crazy, but he wanted his son to know that spending time with him was very important to his Dad. So his son had a one hour marker he could use everyday to guarantee that they had at least one hour together. The marker could be used to play catch, or to watch TV together, or to work on homework, or to just to talk. The now grown son said that one of the best gifts from his father was that year of time. Men, let's not forget the importance of time and presence when it comes to our children! You are having an impact on your children!

I am testifying to things today because the word “testimony” is a key word in scripture today. 2 Timothy is a little book near the end of the New Testament. It is known as a pastoral letter because it was addressed to one person – Timothy, a young companion of the apostle Paul who traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys and was sent by Paul to represent him at churches they had started.

Two of the books in the New Testament are supposedly written by Paul to this young Christian called Timothy. Today biblical scholars think that only a fragment of 2 Timothy was written by Paul and the rest was an add-on by third generation Christians trying to help the current generation live their faith. But whoever wrote it, it is a deeply personal letter as if written by an older follower of Christ to a newer disciple.

What I like about the passage is that it talks about the generations of faith. It speaks of the faith that Timothy received first from his grandmother, Lois, and then his mother, Eunice, and now the writer hoped lived in Timothy. Timothy was invited to rekindle the gift of God that he had received by the laying on of hands and to live by 3 things – a spirit of power from Christ, a spirit of love, and a spirit of self-discipline and to not be ashamed to testify to what he believed in Christ. We are invited to still live by the spirit of Christ, the spirit of love, and the spirit of self-discipline. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are invited to rekindle the gift of God regularly by giving testimonies of faith in what we say, what we do, and what we think.

One of my favorite clergy persons today is a woman by the name of Lillian Daniels. Rev. Dr. Daniels is the Senior Pastor of the First

Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. She is the kind of speaker that can talk for 45 minutes and it seems like 10. She is a marvelous pastor of faith and insight.

Several years ago, she wrote a book called *Tell it like it Is- Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony* which is a book about the importance of giving people the opportunity to give their testimonies of faith and how congregations are strengthened by the practice. She invites youth to give their testimonies about their faith in God as well as adults. She has found it as a way to revitalize congregations because it re-energizes members of the congregation.

What would you say if you were invited to give your testimony about God in your life? Like Timothy, we are invited to not be ashamed of the gospel but give testimony to our faith in God through Christ by what we say and do. What would you testify to? With thought and prayer, everyone has something to say, but everyone discovers they have more to learn and experience. Giving testimony is a powerful way to go deeper in our relationship with God.

I can give a testimony today - so far I have found a dynamic, exciting congregation in Flossmoor, Illinois. It is dynamic because it is excited about Jesus Christ. It is excited about diversity. It is excited about mission. I can also testify that you are excited about quality worship though you are not sure how diverse you want to be in this area.

I can also testify that this tension about how to worship is not unusual. In my ministry, I have never seen people so divided about how

to do worship. Each generation more or less has its own ideas of how to do it which makes it hard to co-exist in the same congregation.

I blame the health care system for the dilemma. We live in a time when not just the young are healthy and vigorous. Middle age and older adults are still active and vibrant. They have the mental and physical ability to be active, doing and experiencing.

It wasn't that way 50 years ago and before. 50 years ago my grandparents felt they were old and acted like it. They were happy to turn things over to the next generation. They didn't always like what the next generation wanted to do, but they didn't have the numbers or energy to do very much about it.

Not so today. There is vitality in the people of all ages, and as a result, each generation has developed their own world view and values. I look at the world differently than my father or my son, but it is OK because we are related to each other and try to appreciate what each values. In the church, there is now 3 or 4 active adult generations trying to do church. Each with its own understanding of music and faith and values, each invited to hear the call of Christ to be faithful followers of love and service; each feeling frustrated how others want to experience God, and each searching for that transcendent moment of God in our midst.

What's a church to do?... Some are becoming generational churches that meet the needs of a particular generation but then slowly fades away. But a few discover how to value their diversity because it allows different people to find a place at the table to find God and serve in power, love, and self-discipline. I compliment you on being that kind of church. We

discover that we are of different generations and have different interests and have different views, but we are one in Christ, and in that oneness we thrive! Today I think it is still possible for Lois, Eunice and Timothy to all be together in one body of Christ. I give testimony today to your diversity held together by the oneness of Christ.

Reverend Elaine Sauer, Bishop of the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, comments that her grandmother was her first spiritual mentor. This grandmother, a devout though excommunicated Catholic (she was divorced), taught her grandchild about grace, forgiveness, and the family of God. These were messages that grew and bloomed in Reverend Sauer's life.

Timothy had both a mother and a grandmother who were strong in their faith. Our scripture draws the connection between their faith and Timothy's. What a blessing to have faithful parents and grandparents.

A church is about faith, love, and serve that is the power of any congregation. Today we give testimony to the power of Christ in our midst and the power of his cross to save and move us. Every generation is called to hear the voice of God at work in their life and work together in community to live it, proclaim it, and share it. I give testimony to the power of God to inspire each generation to live in faith, hope and love in Jesus' name! Amen.

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