

*Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.*

Whether it's a person I knew quite well or someone I've never met, when meeting with a family about a memorial service, I always ask: What's something about your loved one worth shouting from the rooftop? What's something you want to celebrate?

What a privilege to listen to the answers.

"He was the exact same person in private as he was in public," someone once told me – a tribute to which I would aspire.

For a service I did the other week at Ashlar, the family described an industrious woman who grew so much kale in the backyard that she rinsed it in the family washing machine. Details – quirks even – each as unique as the person who embodied them.

All of which makes me wonder what it was about the grandmother and mother mentioned by name in today's second reading, a letter attributed to St. Paul for his protégé Timothy. It comments on the "sincere faith" of grandmother Lois and mother Eunice which now lives on in Timothy.

We don't really know anything about Lois and Eunice, except that there was something about them that Timothy (and, it seems, Paul) felt worth passing down through the centuries to us today. By the grace of God, in each succeeding generation, someone did something to share the love of Jesus.

We have, wisely, taken the opportunity to honor that legacy here. Six years ago we celebrated the 275<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this worshipping community in Wallingford. That means we've now made it to our 281<sup>st</sup> year – no small thing. That's a lot of Lois and Eunices passing down the faith.

When COVID hit a couple of years ago, we'd just finished celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of this building, honoring the foresight, generosity and faith of those who got us here.

And this past Juneteenth, we dedicated Witness Stones in front of church for Grace and Esau, two enslaved persons mentioned by name in our parish history. They and perhaps twelve other enslaved persons associated with our parish are finally being recognized for their contributions to our life together. I hope you'll plan on being at the Witness Stones workshop we're hosting on All Saints' Sunday, November 6, at 4:00PM. Please look for more details in the next couple weeks.

The truth is, we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Some have their names enshrined on witness stones, stained glass or brass plaques. (We're looking at you over there, Samuel Simpson!) And it's lovely that someone saw fit to recognize them in this way. But the vast majority are folks whose names we'll never know. Folks like most of us, who make this parish what it is today, and mark its character for years to come. What we do today will impact those who come here seeking God long after we're gone.

Personally, I alternate between finding this terrifying and exhilarating. I know that the people (not just the priest!) -- but *the people* -- of a parish shape its legacy for decades. So we might as well own it, and pray God we leave behind more good than ill.

Another thing I alternate between finding terrifying or exhilarating, is this liminal space, this threshold time we're living in as we crawl out of the pandemic era. We all remember those strange days of March 2020 when we sensed that something big was hitting us

but weren't sure what it was.

I'm still not sure we know exactly what hit us or what it means for the future.

But we can pray God for guidance.

We can be faithful in it.

We can give up our preconceived notions about the future, and nostalgic longings for the past.

We can listen, deeply, to the world around us.

We can be gentle with one another, and ourselves, in the meantime.

And did I mention that we can and should pray God for guidance?

Today's lections all have so much to offer us in this strange liminal – neither betwixt nor between -- time in which we live.

That first reading from Lamentations shows the importance of, well, lament without expecting swift resolution.

I sense a lot of us have a lot more lamenting yet to do than we like to admit.

The Psalm reenforces the need for lamenting, with an added kick of anger, because that's part of who we are too.

The Gospel lesson teaches that increasing faith is more about what we do than what we happen to feel.

And the letter to Timothy? Well, it's about doing it all for and with others, on behalf of those who come after.

Paul himself was likely approaching death at the time of this second letter to Timothy.

Paul was imprisoned, well aware that martyrdom may be his future.

Yet he dreamed of a future that was beyond *his* future.

Paul dreamed of a future that includes us today.

I appreciate his tender commendation of

Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice.

It's a good reminder for us to be thankful for those who've inspired us.

I also appreciate the end of this passage, challenging us to inspire others:

"Guard the good treasure entrusted to you,  
with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."

Note how it moves from the singular – *the good treasure entrusted to you* – into the plural – *the Holy Spirit living in us*.

How it reminds us that whatever we have is not for ourselves alone, but for the world God so loves. Especially this little corner of it.

It reminds us that the best way to safeguard something is to give it away. Pay it forward. Share it with others. Create something that outlasts ourselves.

By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we each have good treasure, aplenty – time; skills, interests, quirks; financial resources; and more. And it's all needed.

It's all needed right here, right now, and with an eye toward the future.

What are some things the Spirit is giving you to safeguard and share?

What are some gifts you think are particularly needed as we write the next chapter of our parish life, now, in the year of our Lord 2022, approaching our 282<sup>nd</sup> year of service?

I so look forward to hearing your answers.

Thank you. Thanks be to God for you.