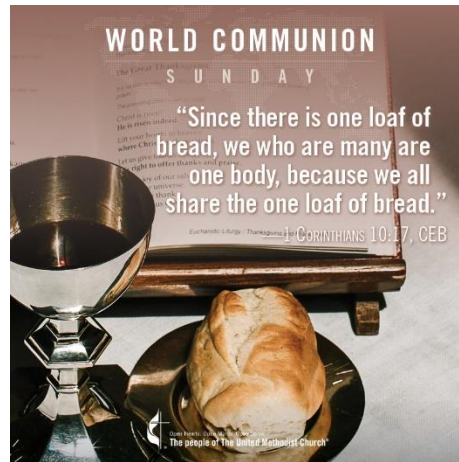


Sermon – October 2, 2022  
“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you.”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-14

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill us with open hearts, and anoint the sharing of these words, making them a blessing for your people that transforms us into Christ's image and guides us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Good morning, all. It is great to see that we have survived Hurricane Ian and are able to gather in our sanctuary this morning. Keep the people of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in your prayers. If you would like to respond to the needs created by the storm, there is an UMCOR relief fund set up for that purpose. To donate through the church, put the UMCOR number, # 901670 for U.S. Disasters, in the memo line and make out your check to the church. One hundred percent of your contribution goes to help those with needs caused by the storm to recover.

Today is World Communion Sunday. Many Protestant churches have a Communion service only once a quarter. Today is the Sunday that a great number of churches all across the globe have agreed to set aside and hold a Communion service. We will join them shortly in a time of communion with Christ, each other, and thousands and thousands of churches across the globe. Be mindful of this connection as we share and celebrate Communion together today.

If you are following in your Bibles, turn to the second letter Paul writes to Timothy, and if you are using a pew Bible, it is page 211. We are looking at chapter 1, verses 1-14. It is a rich letter for deepening our understanding of Christian living. Don't miss how Paul writes in the introduction of the letter that Timothy is his beloved child. Paul is not Timothy's father, as we know that Timothy's father was a Greek. We might ask ourselves then, "What is Paul saying in this statement when he speaks to Timothy as a son?" Paul speaks as a spiritual parent, one who invests time and energy into another person, sometimes a younger person, to help him or her grow in knowledge of Christ, and as this person learns about Christ, to help him or her grow into or take on more fully the image of Christ. As Paul has invested in Timothy's faith development, now Paul is encouraging Timothy to be a spiritual father to those he is working with in Ephesus. He is doing this while he is aware that false teachers are at work around Timothy. Paul seeks to remind Timothy of his faith and encourages him to be effective in sharing that faith with others as Paul shared his own faith with Timothy. We are all called to be spiritual parents for those who do not know Christ. We are to be investing our lives into the lives of others, helping them to become believers, and after they do, helping them to grow in faith and learn to share their growing faith with others. A key part of being a spiritual parent is to pray for those we are seeking to walk with in faith, praying night and day as Paul does for Timothy. We are to be those found in prayer often for those we are seeking to aid in their faith development. Notice Paul also anticipates the joy of being reconnected with Timothy. Paul is physically separated from Timothy, but is seeking even in separation to maintain a connection with his spiritual son. Paul looks forward to a time in the future when he will be with Timothy again and they are able to have fellowship and share their faith journeys with each other.

I like the words Paul uses as he greets Timothy: "grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Here in Paul's writing is a wonderful greeting for us to adopt and share when we meet each other in public places and religious settings. Instead of asking people how they are doing, tell them to "receive grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." That is a wonderful greeting and might allow a time of sharing that speaks to the grace, mercy and peace we have recently experienced from Jesus, or even to anticipated gifts of grace, mercy and peace we are looking forward to receiving. The passing of the peace this morning would be a time to practice this greeting.

One of the many interesting things for me in this letter is the role that Timothy's grandmother and mother had in his faith development. Paul acknowledges their roles and names the faith legacy they have left through their own efforts to help Timothy grow in faith. As parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents, we are to be looking for opportunities to help those in our families encounter Jesus and grow in faith. Paul is also encouraging Timothy to remember the faith that he has seen in these women and to use that remembrance to help him reconnect and grow his own faith in Christ. We great grandparents, grandparents and parents are also to seek to have this impact in the lives of the future generations that are of our own households and in the households around us in our communities. Don't just limit this idea to our own homes. Look around in our communities and neighborhoods and find those youth, young adults, and other seniors with whom we can seek to develop a new relationship and nurture them into a renewed and deepening faith in Christ.

Do we have any former Boy Scouts here this morning? Paul tells Timothy to rekindle the flame that is within him. The word rekindle is maybe a little weak to communicate what Paul is telling Timothy to do. The idea is to take a spark and work with it, blow on it, provide it with fuel that helps it grow, and to diligently continue to provide fuel until that spark is transformed into a roaring fire. Rekindling does not equate to pushing the button on the remote of our gas logs to get them started. Timothy is being told to provide fresh fuel to the spark so that it can take hold in new fuel. He is being encouraged to continue to nurture the flame until it grows into a blazing fire. When Paul wrote the word translated as rekindle, he meant more than adding a little fresh fuel to a fire. He is reminding Timothy to get deeply involved in the work of starting a fire. Paul reminds Timothy to rekindle, reignite, and renew the gift that was in him from the laying on of Paul's hands. We need to understand what this gift is that Timothy has been given so that we also may work to rekindle a similar gift in us. We need some evidence to help us identify what this gift might be. Notice that immediately after telling Timothy to rekindle his gift, Paul writes in verse 7, "for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." Now, if I were reading those words in my own Bible, I would underline verse 7. Whatever this gift is, it is not a spirit of cowardice but power, love and self-discipline, and it is a gift given by God. If we begin to search the scriptures for evidence to help us identify this gift, we might recall Peter, who after being filled with Holy Spirit at Pentecost, had the courage to stand up and declare the Gospel and thousands came to belief in

Jesus. We might catch a connection to the rekindling of a fire and remember the tongues of flame that came at Pentecost. We might also remember that in Paul's life there was a disciple named Ananias who with great courage obeyed God and came to where blind Paul was staying. Let me read from Acts 9:17: "So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with Holy Spirit.'" It is through the laying on of hands that Paul is healed but also receives the gift of Holy Spirit. I think there is sufficient evidence in the scripture for us to realize that Timothy also has received the gift of Holy Spirit through the laying on of Paul's hands and a similar prayer. Paul is reminding Timothy, his spiritual son, to rekindle the fire from Holy Spirit which is in him. Timothy is in a struggle with false teachers in Ephesus and Paul does not start by telling him how to deal with their teaching, but first tells Timothy to rekindle the flame of Holy Spirit, the spirit of power and love and self-discipline that is within him. Fresh fire from God is what Timothy will need to successfully shepherd the church in Ephesus, and it is what we need today to shepherd our church. It is what we will need to be led to spiritual children and to love them into the kingdom of God.

Let me ask us some questions, church. "Do we have Holy Spirit present in us? Do we also need to rekindle the spark in us? Do we have the spirit of power, the spirit of love, and the spirit of self-discipline?" We need Holy Spirit. Without Holy Spirit, we will not be successful dealing with the false teachers of our time. When we baptize in the United Methodist Church, after we baptize with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we lay our hands on the person and pray for them to receive Holy Spirit, and this is not unique to the UMC. There is a very good chance that many who are lifelong Methodist have received Holy Spirit. There is a great chance that many who have come from other denominations also have the gift of Holy Spirit. We have had hands laid on us and we have been given the gift of Holy Spirit. Like Timothy, we are to remember this gift and seek to rekindle it into a fire in our hearts. Our task then becomes like Timothy's, to rekindle or fan to life the gift we have within us through the laying on of hands.

So, what do we do to fan the fire within us? What do we do to find again or for the first time receive the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline within our hearts? How do we begin to receive fresh fire from God? These are good questions. Let me share an example we have from John Wesley and his experience with starting a fire in his heart. Let me read from an entry in his

journal. This is from an entry dated January 1, 1739. John and others are gathered at Fetter Lane, a small chapel that was an early place Methodists met. John Wesley's Aldersgate experience occurred a few months before, in May, when he felt his heart strangely warmed and knew that his sins, even his, were forgiven. Those gathered are at a watch night service. Many had gathered on New Year's Eve not for a party, but to share the love of Christ they had experienced in the previous year and to pray for God's guidance in the coming year. Wesley writes "Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, [George] Whitefield, Hutchings, and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.'" If we ever wonder why John Wesley liked to have these watch night services and why they are included in Methodist worship, I think this event helps to explain his desire to pray in the new year. After this experience, Wesley begins to preach in the open fields of England, and people who have not heard the Gospel hear, respond, and surrender their lives to Christ and seek to follow Jesus. Now I am not asking us to hold a love feast or a watch night service. I am not going to ask us to follow a love feast with a time of prayer into the early hours of the next day. But if any are willing, I will come and pray.

So, what do we do to fan the flames in our hearts to life? Let me give you another example. Judy, Kevin, and I and about 3000 others were blessed to gather outside of Nashville last week at the New Room Conference and to worship, learn, pray, and have fellowship. New Room is a place bathed in prayer for days on end prior to and during the conference. On the last day, one of the speakers, Carol Ward, shared some of her life story and at the end of her time of sharing, she called those gathered there into a time of prayer and people streamed forward and prayed. People who could not go forward because the aisles had filled prayed with each other where they were, and prayer continued on for maybe an hour or more. The next speaker, who was to close the conference, when asked what to do replied, "Prayer is better than preaching." And so we prayed. And the spark of Holy Spirit began to grow into flames of fire in the hearts of many. Now I don't think we will be able to get Carol to come and speak here, as great a blessing as that would be, and yes, I do think that any who are willing should make plans to attend the

next New Room conference in September of 2023. You will be blessed and I suspect that the gift of Holy Spirit within your own heart will be fanned into a blazing fire if you choose to attend.

But, what can we do in this place, in our own hearts, to fan the spark found there into flame, to start a fire in our hearts that becomes a blazing fire? Let me offer a beginning point. During our closing hymn after Communion, if you would like to start to flame the spark given by Holy Spirit in your heart, then come and allow me in obedience to the Word to lay my hands on you and pray for you to receive fresh the Holy Spirit, to receive the spirit of power, the spirit of love, and the spirit of self-discipline. And then begin to pray, asking Jesus to fan the spark in our hearts into a flame that burns away all that keeps us from serving Jesus and allows us to go out into the world not in a spirit of cowardice, but in a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and a spirit of self-discipline. Next, begin to seek holiness of heart and mind, confessing our sins to God, repenting and turning from our sins to God in Christ. Next, seek to learn about Jesus through the reading of scriptures, coming together and sharing what we learn and encouraging each other to grow into Jesus' image. And finally, love each other boldly. This is Jesus' command to his disciples, to love one another. And as we do, we begin to open the spark in our hearts to the oxygen of love, and a spark becomes a flame which grows into a raging fire. That fire goes forth as a light to all of the world. Now let me close and let us join with our brothers and sisters across the globe and enter into Communion, and then come as you are stirred during our closing hymn to receive Holy Spirit.

*Pray with me: Father, place a spark of Holy Spirit in our hearts, Start a fire in our hearts. Fan the spark within us into a fire that will give us the spirit of power, the spirit of love, and the spirit of self-discipline. We ask in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen*

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Go forth into Jesus' mission.