

SERMON

Pastor Cris Frigm

The letter to Timothy is a motivational speech, an exhortation to live out the faith that has been handed down to Timothy by the faithful who have gone before him. “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” After firmly grounding faith in the good news – in the gospel, in the truth of God’s love – the author goes on to say, “Guard the good deposit entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”

I’ll admit to being a little wary of motivational speeches these days. There’s a hesitancy that comes through cynicism that looks for the motivation behind the motivations...what is it that fuels the speaker? What do they get out of inspiring someone else to do something? There’s a certain level of distrust that kicks in – inversely proportional to how well I know the speaker.

For example, if I were to tell you that you should reach under your pew because there is a surprise taped under there for some lucky member of the congregation, you might really start to doubt my credibility. You might start to question why I’m resorting to door prize tricks to get your attention. It might work once, but then you’ll wonder what other tricks I might use to get and keep your attention. Some of you might be really tempted to reach under your pew right now, but don’t...I didn’t actually put out any prizes.

Part of us establishing a relationship of pastor and congregation is understanding one another. As we learn each other’s stories, we learn how we can be stretched to understand one another, the world around us, and the God who loves us. I hope that it doesn’t take motivational tricks to get us to pay attention to the words of Jesus, the words of Paul, the words of the prophets and psalmists.

Sometimes, the simplest motivation comes from that often-used-Nike-slogan, “just do it.”

I don’t put Jesus in the position of being a motivational speaker, but we often turn to his words to figure out just how it is that we’ll navigate the road of discipleship. Sometimes we need the motivation that comes from hearing the story of God’s love to better understand what it is we’re supposed to do.

Today’s words come on a literal road, as Jesus and his followers are traveling toward Jerusalem. But his motivation takes a little bit of unpacking to understand what’s going on.

Note first that what came before the plea of the disciples is the command to forgive

– repeatedly and with love. The disciples are told to guard themselves that they don't cause anyone to lose their way on the journey of discipleship. They're told not to be a stumbling block, to help the wayward find their way back. Over and over again, as many times as it takes.

To which the disciples respond, "increase our faith!" I think of it as "Please, God, help me because this is impossible!" With all the desperation you can put into it. Because it's really hard to forgive. It's really hard to forgive over and over again. In truth, it's really hard to follow the path of discipleship.

Just a little more faith might be nice, maybe a lot more faith. Please, God, give me faith the size of a mountain so that I can just do it better.

The motivation isn't what we expect, however. The motivation that Jesus offers is a reminder that our life of discipleship isn't a quantitative exercise. There is no such thing as **more** faith. We either believe in the promises of God and act on their behalf in the world or we don't. In a sense, Jesus says, "just do it."

Now if you're feeling a little unfaithful at the moment. If you aren't really sure what it really means to trust in God's promises, then that doesn't sound very motivating either. But the hope in this passage, the good news in the words of Jesus, is that, even in those darkest moments when it feels like we don't know what God is saying or doing or whether we believe in the stories we've been given – in those moments, we are still loved and claimed and held in the promise of the resurrection. Even in those moments, we just do it.

It doesn't have to feel like we're uprooting a mulberry tree with our bare hands. It doesn't have to feel like we're getting a tree to grow in the ocean. We simply do whatever is placed in front of us and trust that God will make it bear fruit.

We're beginning a stewardship campaign this week as we are asked, as a gathering of disciples, to commit to the ministry we share in this place and that feels like a quantitative question by its nature, but I would argue it isn't.

Yes, we are measuring dollars so that we understand what resources we have to do the work God is calling us to do. But I would also argue that this is a "just do it" moment. Your ability to offer a pledge – in any amount – to the work we do together is not a challenge to put some kind of value on your faith. It is an exercise in trusting that God will use what you give back to uproot the mulberry trees.

Or, in today's reality, maybe it will be used to plant mulberry trees, and pine trees,

and apple trees, and the seeds of beloved communities that will sprout into grace-filled conversations and hope-filled neighborhoods.

We heard one story this morning about a ministry that is growing in this time and place as we impact over 20 families looking to safely and faithfully raise their children. We'll hear other stories in the coming weeks about what it means to live faithfully in today's world.

Living as a disciple is about trusting in the promise that God makes to you and remembering the faith that God grows in you through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Living as a disciple is about doing what God has asked of you **because** of what God has done for you. Forgiveness. Life everlasting. Hope in Christ. Just do it. Amen.