

The Call of Tomorrow

2 Timothy 1:1-14

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In the middle of the summer, I received a text message with a video attachment. The video was from a young German woman named Claudia. She had lived in West Hartford for the past few years because of her husband's job. While here, she often came to our Taizé services and sometimes read the Gospel for us in German. Claudia had attended Taizé services in Germany and was happy to discover them in West Hartford. I did not see her before she moved back to Germany, so she sent me the video. In it Claudia thanks First Church and the whole Taizé community for the worship we provided. Smiling into the camera, she reflected on what the service meant to her, stating that every time she came to Taizé, it was like "nursing her soul." She said that every time she goes to Taizé in Germany, she will think of us and send us a postcard.

We have a similar situation in our scripture this morning. We hear about gratitude for a community of faith, but, instead of a video, we have an ancient form of communication – a letter. The text, which happens to be from this week's lectionary readings, is the opening of 2 Timothy. This letter is found towards the back of the New Testament. A follower of Paul is writing to Timothy, who was clearly part of a faithful Christian community about three generations old. The author notes that Timothy's sincere faith has been nurtured first by his grandmother, Lois, and then by his mother, Eunice. He then goes on to urge Timothy to stay strong in the faith and not give in to a spirit of cowardice, but to embrace a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. Our text ends with the writer encouraging Timothy to "guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us."

This scripture is a wonderful guideline for us as we end the celebration of our 300th anniversary year and take a look at "The Call of Tomorrow."

The scripture teaches that the story of faith is to get passed from one generation to the other. We have passed our faith from one generation to the other for three hundred years through our worship, educational programs and faithful service to others. Passing our faith from one generation to the other is at the core of who we are as a church. The importance of this aspect of our faith became quite personal for me a few years ago.

One Sunday morning in the fall of 2005, Betty DeNoyon, a faithful older member of our church, approached me about ten minutes before our worship began. She took hold of my arm, looked me in the eye, and told me she wanted to speak with me. I was surprised because people don't usually want to have conversations just before worship, but Betty repeated that she would like to talk with me before worship began. We walked out of the Meeting House and up the ramp by the north door and stood by the window. She placed two small boxes on the window sill and explained that when she was in high school, her Latin teacher went to Iona, Scotland twice. Each time she went, she bought Betty a pin made by the silversmith on the Isle. Since I was to lead my first pilgrimage to Iona the

following spring, Betty wanted me to have one of the pins. I was surprised and touched by this gesture. I opened the first box and there was a lovely, round silver and blue enamel pin with a boat on it that is a symbol often seen on the Isle. In the second box, there was a larger, tarnished, silver pin that had a Celtic design on it and seemed to jump out at me when I opened the lid. It was clear this was the pin I was meant to have.

After the service, I took the pin home and polished it. A beautiful, Celtic design became clear with a cross in the center of the pin. On the arms of the cross was a figure that I assumed was Christ. I took the pin back to church, placed it on the center of my robe, and from that day forward I have always worn the pin when I wear a robe. I went to Iona and came home. I went back to Iona and came home. I went back in 2008 for a third visit to Iona and decided to stop into the little Heritage Museum on the Isle. While looking in one of the museum cases, I was surprised to see pins that were similar to the one Betty had given me. The woman who runs the Heritage Center explained that there was a silversmith on the Isle at the beginning of the 20th century who took rubbings from the ancient grave stones and used those Celtic designs to create silver pieces. After returning home, I sent a picture of my pin to a historian who is an expert about this silversmith and I discovered that the gift Betty had given me was known as the "Prioress Anna Pin." A 16th century nun, Prioress Anna was the last Prioress of the nunnery on Iona and the only woman buried there. The pin is a rubbing from her tombstone, showing her standing and holding two little dogs. It is her image that is on the cross on my pin. I was touched and delighted to discover the story of my pin for many reasons. I felt that Prioress Anna was a kindred spirit; we both love small dogs, as I have two dachshunds. Over the years, I have often reflected on what kind of woman Prioress Anna might have been and how I might carry on her faith story as I minister in the 21st century. As I have reflected about how Prioress Anna was a woman of prayer, compassion, hospitality and spiritual guidance, I have tried to embrace those qualities in my own life. I have been changed and guided through this reflection.

This all began because a grandmother of our faith in this congregation took me aside one Sunday morning and asked to speak with me.

Our scripture also teaches that each generation is to guard the good treasure of the faith that has been entrusted to us.

We have taken this responsibility seriously during our 300th anniversary year. Collectively we have looked at almost every nook and cranny of our life as a community of faith. The core group of the 300th committee has been working diligently to present a strategic planning report to the congregation. Last Wednesday night, a few of us met to begin the final editing process of the report. By working together, first at our church retreat last spring, then in smaller work groups, and then in the core group committee, we have gathered the wisdom of the community. We are getting ready to put this wisdom into action and move into our 4th century.

Finally, and perhaps most important, scripture teaches that we are to be attentive to the Holy Spirit that lives in each of us. It is the Spirit that guides and teaches us from one

generation to the next. It is this Spirit that we must embrace as we seek to be a church in the 21st century.

In her movie, "Humanity Ascending," (which will be in our library soon), Barbara Marks Hubbard uses the image of the caterpillar's transformation to a butterfly as an example of the necessity of transformation that is needed in our era. She explains that when a caterpillar goes into its cocoon, imaginal disks are released. Then, from the imaginal disks, imaginal cells are formed. At first the caterpillar fights the imaginal cells and kills off a few in the attempt to stay a caterpillar. Over time, however, there are too many imaginal cells and the caterpillar surrenders to the process of becoming a cocoon. Inside the cocoon, the cells form the butterfly and when it is ready, the butterfly is released into the world.

This is our call to the future - to be the imaginal cells of First Church. As we release our need to resist change and open our hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, we will become the church we are meant to be in this century.

We live in an amazing time in history. We have seen the picture of earth from outer space ó a picture that has offered a vision of wholeness, oneness. We live in an Internet era that allows us to be in instant communication with people all over the globe. We are part of a national church that preaches an inclusive, open theology of God's overarching love. For the first time in history, we can truly open our arms to our diverse world and embrace Paul's words that "we are all one in Christ Jesus." Everyone is welcome at God's table.

We are the imaginal cells that will birth the story of God's amazing, inclusive love in this place, in this time, in the center of West Hartford.

May God be with us on the journey. Amen.

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