

**Sermon “Ringmasters and Chaos”**  
**Kirk of St James**  
**Sunday September 14, 2025**  
**Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton**

Our welcome back Sunday is always one of my favourite services of the year. Over the summer many of us travel or spend time away so it is always wonderful when September hits and things swing back into routine--it is an absolute joy to gather together again and celebrate being in community. Grayson has been asking all weekend when he gets to go to Sunday School and then play games after church. I think Theo is it in for the snacks and prizes! Either way they have been counting down to this morning!

One of my favourite things about this morning is the fact that it is an intergenerational celebration. Over food, laughter, community and absolute chaos we celebrate what it is to be a church together. I laughed when I read over my notes from the event last year and noted, “We need a ring master to try and keep things less chaotic!” (Our theme last year was under the big top!). 1 Timothy is a wonderful scripture reading to launch the year ahead. Now there are a number of things I could tell you about this book. For example, the structure of the letter follows the typical patterns of Hellenistic/Roman letters which often included a brief prayer of thanksgiving after the salutation. We could get into a discussion about the seven undisputed letters of Paul, and how 1 Timothy does not follow the same patterns. We could talk about the differences between letters, for example while Paul typically opens with thanksgiving for those he is writing too, he was so mad at the Galatian church he did not do so. I am not going to focus on any of those things today. Instead, we are going to talk about a letter that was written from a mentor to a cherished mentee.

In 1 Timothy 1 the letter opens with, “To Timothy, my loyal child...” what follows is a letter full of honesty, and encouragement. It comes from “an older pastor at the brink of retirement to a young pastor just beginning ministry. However, this Pastoral Epistle was not included in the canon just to aid those in the professional ministry, but for the edification of the entire body of Christ. Who are the Paul’s and the Timothys of the twenty-first century church?” The answer is all of us. Through raw and honest sharing Paul lays out the joy and the hope that can be found in faith.

The way Paul goes about this is first to confess how broken he was, and to acknowledge the violence that he perpetrated. Paul stood by while a young man was stoned to death on his orders. He persecuted the church, and ripped families apart. He tried to stamp out the message of Jesus Christ and keep it from spreading. Then one day, God stops him in his tracks on the road to Damascus, and his encounter with the living God changed his life. This message becomes a crucial point of Paul’s faith. He emphasizes “how far he fell, in order to illustrate how low a gracious God would stoop to pick him up...” That is where the message begins—God will meet us at our absolute worst.

Paul was not alone in championing this message. The reformer Martin Luther grappled with the love and mercy of God vs. human sinfulness. Luther struggled with anxiety and depression because he felt it was impossible to live up to God’s standards. Overtime Luther came to the understanding that it is not about living up to God’s standards and trying to attain a certain level of perfection. Rather faith is about the grace and mercy of God which are a gift freely given. We do not earn the love of God, because we cannot earn that which is freely given.

It is here that the message of Paul to Timothy begins, and it here we as a church begin. We ask ourselves how we can share this message of hope with our children and within the world. The beauty of intergenerational community, like we have in the church, is the way we share this life together. A congregation has not existed here for two hundred years simply because there is a nice building, or because we should—we have continued to meet and change over two centuries because we know that there is something lifegiving to find in our faith. We do not worship a God that is dead and dusty, we worship a living God who engages in our lives. We seek to find ways both new and old to share the good news and welcome people. One of the ways we do that is through telling our story.

Every congregation has Paul's—people who share their faith, who invest in the vision for the future, who plant apple trees today, so that the generations to come will have apples to eat. People sit on committees and wrestle with decisions, volunteer their time, and work for the good of the church because they know there is something life giving here. We believe and we support the Timothys of our congregation. We see them in our choir every week, and we send young people off on new adventures at college, university, work and gap years with our love and our prayers. We try to support people when they are feeling at their most vulnerable and broken for example by providing safe space to those in NA meetings.

For us--the Paul's and the Timothys of our church we are likely all looking for something similar. A place to belong. A place to find love and grace. To find meaning for our lives, and hope in a world that can sometimes feel hopeless. We are looking for something that is life changing. It would likely be fair to say we are not looking for "platitudes and warmed-over theological sentiments." We want to know that there is substance behind the ancient language of

the church. We don't want busyness we want intention. Every generation has had to discover these things for the church and its current context, just as we are striving to do so now. This work can be messy, chaotic, anxious and uncertain, yet at the same time we embark on the task faithfully and as best we can.

One writer in my commentary series this week said, "Our challenge as twenty first century Pauls, our charge as the older generation which mentors them, is to listen carefully to our Timothys so that together we can participate in experiencing God in Christ Jesus. Our Timothy's invite us onto unknown paths of worship planning, where the Spirit leads us to reframe our "churchy" language and to engage in liturgical experience that may be beyond language." The reverse is also true, we as Paul's have wisdom, love, and hope to share with our younger generations. As a church we continue to figure this out together. Timothy learned everything from Paul, and Paul in turn learned from Timothy.

I was reminded of how that tough that can be with different generations. Leanne shared an experience this week with her children while planning a movie night with the girls she told Kate to look up the Parent Trap on prime the 1998 version. Ella goes "1998!?! Is that even in color? I like to have colour when I watch my movies" It is not always easy for us to find our way but, I think the best place to start is simply by loving each other. Out of love, we find a way together. I love this intergenerational community that we have built here on the corner of Pownall and Fitzroy, and I pray we continue for generations to come.