

A Spirit Gift  
2 Timothy 1:1-14  
October 2, 2016  
Pentecost + 20C  
World Communion Sunday  
St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church  
Rev. Elizabeth Mangham Lott

Today is a table day—gathering around, sharing what is here, trusting there is enough for everyone, gladly passing to our neighbor, making sure each and every person is seated and welcomed. Friends gather around tables, families feed one another around tables, stories are told, memories are shared, tears are shed, laughter echoes when we linger over empty plates and stay awhile. Think with me about your own tables; all of the tables where you have been invited, fed, where you have fed others, the tables where you have felt fully alive and most yourself.

For years, we had this little white table in our little Richmond home with little white chairs just the right size for a toddler or preschooler to sit. We served up PB&Js and grilled cheese sandwiches and goldfish crackers, made art, practiced handwriting. I slowly became a mother around that little table.

Beside that table sat my great-grandmother's table; a woman I never knew but whose legacy of strength, confidence, and determination has been passed down to me. I come from a long line of stubborn Southern women; a legacy of which I am proud. It's the table where I served gumbo at Christmas in Virginia when other Gulf Coast ex-pats were not traveling home for the holidays. The space I converted into a sewing table for making curtains and a crib skirt and pillows when my daughter was born.

My family sits around it every day for meals, homework, making and sewing and tinkering. It sat in my mother's house for more formal occasions until I was married, then the table was passed to me along with along with a box of silver flatware in my grandmother's pattern which she saved until it was time for me to begin my own traditions. I think of every Easter and Thanksgiving and Christmas at her house when our hands touched those same forks and knives and spoons, set out on the table in anticipation of a loving feast.

I remember the card table my grandmother would pull out for those special family gatherings at her house to seat the grandchildren until we outgrew it and a larger "kids'" table was necessary for us. It was the place where ate her famous coke salad and the best turkey dressing and basket after basket of Sister Schubert rolls.

And there are the tables of others like the kitchen table where I sat with my young friend David and his brother Dan on the night that their grandfather died, and we ate vanilla ice cream and fresh peaches, a favorite of my grandfather's who passed away 26 years ago next week, and we told good and funny and hard stories about family.

And there are the round tables where we gather on Wednesday nights because we need each other and we need that time to sit, breathe, laugh, tell a story, be heard, be silent, not be alone. When I first walked into this sanctuary in June 2013, the thing that most made my heart sing was the large, family-style table in our Harris Room at the back of the sanctuary. That room could be a precious, museum-quality space with antiques and treasures of the past 118 years. Instead, it is a gathering space where we'll meet in just a little while for coffee and cookies, eating treats made by Ana Tarcea or Ann Madden or Paul Powell or Mona Bond, friends who patiently stood in their kitchens mixing flour and butter and sugar with love and care as they prepared for the time we would draw near to one another. We catch up on the past week or we introduce ourselves for the first time. We're happy to be together, nervous to be here for the first time, we're reaching for one more cup of coffee, we're reaching for each other.

It is not unlike this table before us, like so many tables down the Avenue and across the city, and front and center in most every church sanctuary in this county and around the world, with bread and wine for everyone. A welcoming table where there is always another chair, always enough to eat, always enough to share, always the best glass to be lifted and toasted and shared with great affection. A table that makes us more ourselves and always has just enough of what we need most.

The epistle text before us today invites us to do this kind of remembering because it is soul work and faith work and returning to our truest selves work. "I know who you are," Paul says to Timothy. "Maybe you've presently forgotten, maybe you're

trapped in a cycle of anxiety and self-doubt right now, but I know who you are. Because I know you, and I knew your mother, and I knew your grandmother. It isn't just that I love you and have poured my life into yours, I knew Lois and Eunice. I knew their faith and their strength. I knew their dedication to living out the ways of God in their lives, and I see them in you. Their eyes, their smile, the way they dug their heels in when someone tried to slow them down. Their fierce loyalty and commitment to doing what is right.

You are timid right now, you're turning in on yourself and shying away from the world, but that's not who you are. God hasn't given us a spirit of fear, Timothy, God has given us a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. I remember the legacy of faith in you, and I want you to remember it to. Remember the hands that have cared for you from your childhood and the hands that blessed and ordained you in worship. The gift of God is within you, Timothy. Remember!"

God has not given us a spirit of fear. I remind myself of those words often when I feel myself shrinking and freezing like Timothy. Like Timothy, the stories of the faith are here to tell me my own. In the ancient story of the first man and first woman who ate what God told them not to eat, they hid from God when they heard God walking in the cool of the day. And God said, "Why are you hiding?" When Elijah moved from the resting place beneath the broom tree to the darkness of the cave, God passed by and said, "Elijah, come out." To the countless prophets and exiles and shepherds and mothers-to-be, "Do not be afraid."

This letter to Timothy is a letter to all of us, and its author is speaking not just to one life but into the human legacy. When we are hiding, when we enshroud ourselves with darkness, when we are overcome by a spirit of fear, that is not God's best for us—as a church, as individuals. Do not listen to the voices that encourage your hiding and your self-preservation. That is not God's gift to us. That is not God's power and love at work. God is at work through those stories of spiritual ancestors who loved and feared and acted and hid and followed and forgot—just like us. Listen for the voice of God in the legacy you have inherited.

For that reason, Oxford New Testament professor Adam writes writes, "The [opening] paragraph [of this letter] as a whole serves to illustrate that on both sides of Timothy's lineage, the maternal and (spiritually) paternal, 'a spirit of power and of

love and of self-discipline' runs in the family."<sup>1</sup> And Matt Skinner adds, "The letter tells Timothy his faith and calling aren't ancillary to his identity; they are part of who he is."<sup>2</sup>

Think of all of those tables where you have eaten and laughed and found courage. Maybe there are too many to count—the friends, the family, the neighbors, the overflowing love of so many good people. Or maybe you don't have too many tables to count, and there are a lot of sad and lonely memories instead. Whatever your story may be, my hope is that the tables here are wide, and the love is overflowing. My hope is that we make room for everyone who wants to dine with us. My hope is that our tables, particularly this table before us in worship today, draw us into the spirit of power and love that runs in our family. May you feel that spirit today. May the meal that we share awaken God's gift in you.<sup>3</sup> May the bread and the cup support you in the course of your journey. May you be called to bold action and service for the good of God's kingdom and the healing of this world. May you come out of hiding, release the fear that prevents you from moving with freedom and grace and peace in the world, may you remember your identity and be strengthened at this table.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=739](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=739)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1834](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1834)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.taize.fr/en\\_article167.html?date=2003-08-01](http://www.taize.fr/en_article167.html?date=2003-08-01)