

**"A SPIRIT OF POWER"**

September 12, 1993

**TEXT: II Timothy 1:6 "Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."**

For most people there are two times a year when we feel as though we are getting a new start. One is on January first with the beginning of a new year, and the other is on our birthday. Some birthdays may be more meaningful than others, but, for me at least, all of them seem to be times for taking stock of my life and thinking about the future.

For those of us who are involved with the church, however, there is a third such time, Rally Day and the beginning of another church activity year. Some may think of Rally Day only in terms of Sunday School, but it is really much more. Today we also return to our regular schedule of worship services. We have our choirs back with us, and I know that you rejoice with me in that. Our boards and committees have met, or will soon be meeting, to direct the work of the church. And some of you who were in other places and doing other things during the summer are back with us now. In a very real sense, today, like January first and our birthdays, is a time for beginning again.

In that context, I can think of no better message to bring to you than that which is contained in this morning's scripture reading: "Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control." (II Timothy 1:6-7)

We do not know a great deal about the circumstances in which Paul wrote those words, but we can make some educated guesses. It is pretty obvious that something had happened to discourage Timothy. Perhaps it was the fact that his friend Paul was in prison facing martyrdom. Perhaps it was because of hardships facing Timothy, himself. It could have been either, or both, for Paul wrote: "Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God."

Whatever it was, there is little doubt that Timothy was down in the dumps and that Paul was writing to bolster his faith and to rekindle his zeal. But it is not only individuals who need to be encouraged. Sometimes whole churches get discouraged, or perhaps they get over-confident. In either case they need someone to remind them that they are God's people called to do God's work.

Take the passage which we read this morning, for instance: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because

you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see."

It does not take any special knowledge to recognize that John was telling them --and us-- that half-hearted Christianity is not good enough. It was not good enough then, and it is not good enough now. If a church is to have any real impact on its own members, or on society, it must have more than a lukewarm commitment.

One of the great preachers and teachers of this century, the late Halford Luccock, once wrote, "One very popular substitute for following the teachings of Jesus is to admire them. It is popular because it is so much easier. It is always in good taste to admire Christianity, and it costs nothing. [And] admiration of this kind is worth just what it costs . . . The purpose of the Gospel is to plow down deep into men's lives and make them fruitful in the largest sense. It is a poor substitute for this to pay the Gospel a few cheap and easy and empty compliments." And when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37)

Now perhaps some of you may be thinking that my words this morning are directed at those who are members of this church but are not here this morning. Or at those who agree with Jesus' more palatable teachings but are not even interested enough to join a church. But they are not! Those people are not around to hear what I am saying. And, besides, Jesus had some very harsh things to say about those who look for the speck in their neighbor's eye and ignore the log in their own. No, I am not talking about them; I am talking about us because we are the only ones we can do anything about.

Now, some of you may be thinking, "But why us? We are not indifferent. We care about the church. We support it with our contributions. We got up this morning and came to church. We serve on boards and committees and sing in the choir. And my answer is that I know you do all of these things. But neither Christianity nor this church will ever have the impact it needs to have unless we all do more. And not many of us can honestly claim that we love the Lord, our God, with all our heart and with all our strength and with all our mind.

You see, that letter in the book of Revelation was not addressed to heathens. It was for good church people like ourselves. Nowhere does it say they were bad people. It even admits that they were not cold. That their fire had not gone out. Like us, they believed; they met for worship; they prayed; they sang; they taught their children about their faith.

But, while they were not cold, they were not hot either. The word John uses is zestos, and it means hot enough to boil. And when John said, "Would that you

were either cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot I will spew you out of my mouth," there can be little doubt that the Laodiceans understood what he meant. Their town had no water supply of its own. All their water came over aqueducts from mineral springs six miles to the south. And while that mineral water was drinkable when it was hot, by the time it reached Laodicea it was lukewarm and quite nauseating. Only if chilled or reheated could it be swallowed and kept down. So John is saying, "Oh, how I wish you either had no religion at all or that you were really enthusiastic. Either one would be better than the polite, conventional religion you have now."

The Laodiceans had religion, but they did not have enough. And neither do we. If we did, the world would not be in the mess that it is in. And our lives would be more abundant, not in things of which we have more than enough, but in the spirit. And our prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven . . . ." would seem less like just words and more like reality.

But if there is not enough zest to our religion, if we are too often spectators and too rarely participants in God's work, what can we do about it? Like Timothy, we need to "rekindle the gift of God" that is within us. And how do we do that? By getting closer to the flame.

We have a fireplace in our family room, and I am one who really likes a good fire. Sometimes, in fact, I get a bit carried away and put on too much wood. Then I have to reach in with my tongs and take a log or two out of the fire and lay it off to one side. It is still in the fireplace, but because it is away from the flames, its fire slowly goes out. When it is time to add more wood, I just put those logs back on the fire, and in no time at all they start to burn again.

The late William Barclay wrote that there was an unwritten saying of Jesus: "He who is close to me is close to the fire." And John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

So, if we are to rekindle the gift of God that is within us, we have to draw closer to the Spirit of God that is in Christ. The Spirit that seeks to dwell in us. We do not have to deserve it. We do not even have to find it. It is there waiting for us to admit it into our hearts and lives. For, in spite of its harsh words, that passage in Revelation goes on to say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)

If life is empty, or even lukewarm, here is the answer: rekindle the gift of God that is within you. Rekindle it by getting closer to the flame that is in Christ. By letting that flame dwell in us as it so lovingly seeks to do.

I had not been told that the water was so hot. But because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold I will spew you out of my mouth. There can be little doubt that the Laodiceans understood what he meant. Their town had no water supply of its own. All their water came over springs from several miles to the south. And since the water was hot, by the time it reached the town it was lukewarm and quite unpalatable. Only if chilled or sweetened could it be swallowed and kept down. So John is saying, "O Laodiceans, how I wish you either had the zeal of the hot water or the cold water. At least you would be better than the lukewarm condition you have now."

The Laodiceans had religion, but they did not have enough. And neither do we. If we had the word of God in the same way that it is in the Laodiceans, we would be more abundant, not in things of which we have more than enough, but in things of which we have none. The word of God will be done in our hearts as it is in the Laodiceans. "The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any sword, it pierces as far as the joints and marrow, and is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

But if there is not enough zeal in our religion, if we are too often negligent and too easily satisfied, we are in danger of losing the word of God. We must be diligent, we must be faithful, we must be obedient. We must be like the Laodiceans, who had the word of God, but who did not have it. We must be like the Laodiceans, who had the word of God, but who did not have it. We must be like the Laodiceans, who had the word of God, but who did not have it.

We have a message in our hearts, and I am sure you will receive it. Good news, good news, in fact, I got a bit carried away and put on too much. I mean I have to reach in with my hands and take a lot of the fire and lay it on one side. It is all in the fire, but because it is so hot, it is so hot, it is so hot, it is so hot. When it is time to lay down, I just put down the legs of the chair, and in no time at all they start to burn again.

The late William Barclay wrote that there was an evangelist saying to Jesus, "He who is close to me is close to the fire." And John 1:9 says, "I am the light, and you are the darkness. He who is close to me is close to the fire, and I in turn, he is the darkness." Much that you hear from me you can do nothing.

So, if we are to receive the gift of God, that is within us, we have to draw near to the Spirit of God that is in Christ. The Spirit that seeks to dwell in us. We do not have to believe it. We do not even have to find it. It is there waiting for us to admit it into our hearts and lives. For in spite of the harsh words, that passage in Revelation goes on to say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)

If it is empty, or even lukewarm, here is the answer. Receive the gift of God that is within you. Receive it by getting closer to the time that is in Christ. By letting that name dwell in us as it so lovingly seeks to do.