

Blessings of Parents and Teachers

I Timothy 1:5–7, I Corinthians 12:27–13:13

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II Timothy 1:5–7

Who was the first person to tell you a Bible story or bring you to worship or Sunday School? My grandmother, Evelyn, told me my first Bible stories, and my mother, Joyce, first took me to worship, so I identify with Paul's words to Timothy here. Perhaps for you it was a father or grandfather, aunt or uncle, neighbor or friend. Whoever got you started on your faith journey is God-parent to you, no matter what their family relationship or if they were named that at your baptism. Whoever plants the seeds first for us, and one hopes that happens in our homes, has given us an enormous gift, though one we may not recognize at the time.

It is the same for our children today. Though they would rather read other books than the Bible or go somewhere other than a worship service, parents/guardians/grandparents or whoever is "family" to a child has the great opportunity and immense responsibility of planting seeds of faith and watering them, never knowing how or if they will grow, but opening up the possibility that faith may sprout. That the child will grow up, as Paul says to Timothy, without a spirit of fear but rather with a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

It's a hard task these days to raise a child without a spirit of fear, because there is so much fear out there in our society. And those raising children are so often made more fearful by social media and urban legends, and if those raising a

child are afraid, the child will be as well. Those children will then grow up to be fearful adults, and goodness knows we don't need more of that.

This morning, I would like us to spend some time in prayer for those who are raising children, especially prayer that they may not live in fear themselves, but rely on God and teach the children to rely on the love, the power, and the courage that can flow through them by the Spirit of God. We'll be silent and I urge you to think of all the people you know raising children and lift them to God in particular, and if that is you, then please pray for yourself!

I Corinthians 12:27–13:13

Let me be clear up front: I Corinthians chapter thirteen is not about weddings, any more than the 23rd Psalm is about funerals. Certainly, the words on love apply to all human relationships, including those of a marriage, but the context of this reading is much larger than that!

Paul has been teaching the Romans about how God has given different kinds of gifts to different people, and that all those gifts are necessary. Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle-workers, healers, those able to interpret God's messages, those who are good at helping, leaders of all kinds: all of these are critical to the faith communities Paul has been helping to form.

Then he says, "Now I will show you something that is more important than any one of those gifts or tasks." He talks about the fact that though you may be the best at whatever it is you do with your gifts, if you act without love, you are not being faithful. It is better to be good at what you do and do it with love than to be the best in the world and do it without love.

Why? Why would it make any difference if you were a teacher who had super skills at teaching but did it for money or some other reason but didn't love your students? Have you had teachers like that? I have, at every level, and so have my children. It made a difference to my and their ability and desire to excel in that class. And when you experience the teacher who loves, you feel the difference in the very room. It doesn't mean they are perfect or that every student will get straight A's, but it makes a difference, both to the students and to their own ability to deal with the difficulties of teaching day after day. I know that sometimes that is so hard for our teachers to do.

Both for the teachers in our schools and colleges and our teachers in Sunday Schools everywhere, this year has had more challenges than most. I'll say Amen for you! Every single one of us needs to express to all the teachers we know and those we don't that what they are doing changes lives and is critical to the well-being of the world.

And every single one of us needs to remember that we are all teachers all the time. That living in love as Christ loved us teaches others about love, about God, about hope, about faith. Here at church and wherever we are.

Today, I invite us to hold in prayer all who teach. If you are a teacher in any kind of school, including our Sunday School, would you stand (and FB and Zoom folk, wave your hand or give a thumbs up in chat)? If you don't know any other teachers, you know these folks.

Listen again to Paul's words about love: Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices

in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

In the silence, let us pray for all who teach, and include ourselves in that prayer. Pray that we may all love as Paul has called us to do. Pray for those who teach.