

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

**Pass the Jelly, Lois
II Timothy 1:1-14
June 27, 2010
Amy Jacks Dean**



To celebrate ten years as your Pastors, Russ and I are in the midst of a Top Ten summer sermon series. Over the years, I have learned that a good many folks really liked this sermon of mine that I preached when we had been here exactly one year. It is a sermon most appropriate for today for several reasons. The title and tale I will tell are from my father who would have been 85 years old tomorrow. He was a storyteller extraordinaire. I won't be able to do his story justice, though I will give it my best. My brother saw in our newsletter that I was preaching this today and couldn't wait to tell me he had found a picture of Lois – the main character in my story and in Timothy's story. And, I believe, that this text is most fitting for one being ordained today. So I repreach it – not just for Gail – but for us all. Here goes:

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fried chicken and thickening gravy, fatback and cornbread, homegrown tomatoes, corn, and green beans, absolutely no casseroles of any kind, but plenty of biscuits and homemade jelly. Now, the way my father told this, back then – 80 years ago – parents didn't fix the child's plate first, cut everything up, get it cooled, have a special table set for the children, and have the ketchup ready to be squirted at the child's command. No, that wasn't how it worked at all! Children waited until the adults ate all they wanted – quietly so as to not to disturb the adult conversation or interrupt the visiting going on at the table. When the “moochers” came through each year – a feast was prepared that would make the children's mouths water and they couldn't wait for the adults to hurry up and finish so that they could eat. What the children especially enjoyed were the biscuits and homemade jelly. And all my father could remember overhearing at the adult dinner table as he awaited his turn to eat was “Pass the jelly, Lois.” You see, Lois was the “moocher's wife”. She was hard of hearing. It was something about the way the “moocher” said it – “Pass the jelly, Lois” - something about the fear that the jelly would be gone before my father got any – something about that phrase stuck with my father and until the morning he died 4 years ago, I can promise you he said to my mother, after he finished his scrambled egg and was ready for a piece of toast – “Pass the jelly, Lois” – and my mother's name is not Lois! I say it, my brother says it, my sister says it, and I think I've said it enough now that my sons can join all the grandchildren in saying when they need a little something for their own biscuit: “Pass the jelly, Lois.” If you are a member of my family, you simply can't ask for the jelly any other way.

I thought about that phrase as I read today's text about Timothy and his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. And I have concluded this: Our faith is pass-on-able. Now let me tell you how I got there.

Paul loved Timothy. He knew that Timothy was a good man, a faithful apostle – a true follower of Jesus. And Paul gave credit where credit was due. It is important to note the Timothy's ancestry was not traced through his father, but was a maternal tracing of character. Paul knew the importance of the “intergenerational character of the mission of the church. He was wondering, as sociologists do today, how faith comes to be passed on from one generation to the other.” (Interpretation, Thomas C. Oden, pg 28)

It's passed on the same way that “Pass the jelly, Lois” was passed on to me. My daddy loved to say it, he loved to tell the story of the Moochers, he loved to hear us say it – as much as he loved to say “the Lord don't love ugly” and “act like you've got parents.” He loved the phrase like he loved to rub his fingers together at the breakfast table and we all knew that that meant “I need another piece of toast.” I know about “Pass the jelly, Lois” because it has been passed on to me just like Timothy's faith was passed on to him from his mother Eunice who got it from her mother Lois.

As Protestants, maybe especially as Baptists, we have proudly and boldly held to a theology of individualism that promotes each person accepting and believing for himself or herself anything about faith and God. We have supported the notion that you do the best can to teach the faith, but ultimately each tub sits on its own bottom, and we are all only accountable for what we accept and believe and what we don't accept and what we don't believe. And that is true – to a point. But today, I want to call us to do something extraordinary. I want to call us to embrace a Stewardship of Family. I want us

pass our faith on to our children – believing that this is the only inheritance worth leaving.

We work so hard to provide the best for our children in every way – food, shelter, clothing, education, values and morals – and I am calling us to pass on our faith in a God who loves us unconditionally – a God who seeks justice and peace for all of God’s children – a God whose grace is indeed amazing.

We need to be having theological conversations with our children. We need to be talking about issues of faith with our teenagers. We need to be raising a generation in our church that yearns for the exploration of faith – that needs a community of faith where they are accepted and loved. I want people to need what can be found here and to crave what can be found here– not good preaching or good programming or good personnel – but what is found here is God and a community of faith who seeks God, and I want all of God’s children (not just the small ones) to need that more than anything else.

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follow Jesus. He looked over at the then 3 year old Bennett, sitting in his carseat – oblivious to our conversation – and said, “Bennett, when you grow up do you want to lead people to follow Jesus?” Bennett replied, “Yea!”

I want to be having that conversation now that they are 11 and 13 and when they are 16 and 18 and when they are 24 and 26 because I believe that my faith is pass-on-able. Just like Lois passed it to Eunice and Eunice passed it Timothy. (You need to know that in the time since I last preached this sermon, both of our boys have been through the water and claimed faith as their own. But I still keep passing it on because we’re not done yet.) This is not just a word for parents and grandparents and children. This is a word for The Church. Gail it’s a word for you. And for all of us. If the Church is to survive, we must believe that we can pass on the faith. Listening to the questions and engaging in conversations that really matter. For God’s sake, Gail, give them your faith.

Paul knew that the future of the church depended upon the transmission of faith – not just from Lois to Eunice and Eunice to Timothy – but from Timothy on to the next generation and on and on it goes even until today. Lois and Eunice appear by name in only this one verse in all of Scripture, but what a powerful verse it is - given what we know about Timothy – he was highly respected by his elders and Paul saw something in this young man that caused him to invite Timothy to join in the missionary journeys.

Joyce Hollyday, one of my favorite commentators, makes this observation:

It is not difficult to imagine Eunice and Lois rocking the infant Timothy to sleep in their arms, singing hymns of triumph, such as those that had come from the lips of Miriam, Deborah, and Mary, for lullabies. We can picture them vividly recounting tales of legendary strength and courage, introducing the young boy Timothy to the heroes of the faith, and teaching him to read and understand the scriptures. And when it came time for them to let go, they must have done so with pride and a flood of tears and prayers for his well-being. (Clothed With the Sun, page 135)

Do I make this sound simple? It is not. Is it too hopeful – too idealistic to believe that this just might work? Some would say yes. I say no. Will it always work? It's worth the risk. When I look at the faith that was handed down to me – oh you can't know how different my faith is now from the faith that was passed on to me – but I wouldn't trade the foundation, the sincerity, and the hope that my family and my church had for me. On so many issues of theology I have strayed from what was passed on to me – but not the faith. Will there be some who will not accept what is passed on? Yes – at least for a time – maybe even a lifetime, but do you still pass on the faith? Yes. Just as sure as am that in tomorrow's heaven my father will say to God, "Pass the jelly, Lois" that's how sure I am that we must pass on the faith to all of God's children. The Church Universal will not survive without it.

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fried chicken and thickening gravy, fatback and cornbread, homegrown tomatoes, corn, and green beans, absolutely no casseroles of any kind, but plenty of biscuits and homemade jelly. Now, the way my father told this, back then – 80 years ago – parents didn't fix the child's plate first, cut everything up, get it cooled, have a special table set for the children, and have the ketchup ready to be squirted at the child's command. No, that wasn't how it worked at all! Children waited until the adults ate all they wanted – quietly so as to not to disturb the adult conversation or interrupt the visiting going on at the table. When the “moochers” came through each year – a feast was prepared that would make the children's mouths water and they couldn't wait for the adults to hurry up and finish so that they could eat. What the children especially enjoyed were the biscuits and homemade jelly. And all my father could remember overhearing at the adult dinner table as he awaited his turn to eat was “Pass the jelly, Lois.” You see, Lois was the “moocher's wife”. She was hard of hearing. It was something about the way the “moocher” said it – “Pass the jelly, Lois” - something about the fear that the jelly would be gone before my father got any – something about that phrase stuck with my father and until the morning he died 4 years ago, I can promise you he said to my mother, after he finished his scrambled egg and was ready for a piece of toast – “Pass the jelly, Lois” – and my mother's name is not Lois! I say it, my brother says it, my sister says it, and I think I've said it enough now that my sons can join all the grandchildren in saying when they need a little something for their own biscuit: “Pass the jelly, Lois.” If you are a member of my family, you simply can't ask for the jelly any other way.

I thought about that phrase as I read today's text about Timothy and his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. And I have concluded this: Our faith is pass-on-able. Now let me tell you how I got there.

Paul loved Timothy. He knew that Timothy was a good man, a faithful apostle – a true follower of Jesus. And Paul gave credit where credit was due. It is important to note the Timothy's ancestry was not traced through his father, but was a maternal tracing of character. Paul knew the importance of the “intergenerational character of the mission of the church. He was wondering, as sociologists do today, how faith comes to be passed on from one generation to the other.” (Interpretation, Thomas C. Oden, pg 28)

It's passed on the same way that “Pass the jelly, Lois” was passed on to me. My daddy loved to say it, he loved to tell the story of the Moochers, he loved to hear us say it – as much as he loved to say “the Lord don't love ugly” and “act like you've got parents.” He loved the phrase like he loved to rub his fingers together at the breakfast table and we all knew that that meant “I need another piece of toast.” I know about “Pass the jelly, Lois” because it has been passed on to me just like Timothy's faith was passed on to him from his mother Eunice who got it from her mother Lois.

As Protestants, maybe especially as Baptists, we have proudly and boldly held to a theology of individualism that promotes each person accepting and believing for himself or herself anything about faith and God. We have supported the notion that you do the best can to teach the faith, but ultimately each tub sits on its own bottom, and we are all only accountable for what we accept and believe and what we don't accept and what we don't believe. And that is true – to a point. But today, I want to call us to do something extraordinary. I want to call us to embrace a Stewardship of Family. I want us

pass our faith on to our children – believing that this is the only inheritance worth leaving.

We work so hard to provide the best for our children in every way – food, shelter, clothing, education, values and morals – and I am calling us to pass on our faith in a God who loves us unconditionally – a God who seeks justice and peace for all of God’s children – a God whose grace is indeed amazing.

We need to be having theological conversations with our children. We need to be talking about issues of faith with our teenagers. We need to be raising a generation in our church that yearns for the exploration of faith – that needs a community of faith where they are accepted and loved. I want people to need what can be found here and to crave what can be found here– not good preaching or good programming or good personnel – but what is found here is God and a community of faith who seeks God, and I want all of God’s children (not just the small ones) to need that more than anything else.

Jackson, who was at the time this sermon was originally preached was 4 and $\frac{3}{4}$ year old, and I had a theological conversation following our baptismal service a couple of weeks before. He was asking what I was wearing under that white robe in the water. I told him underwear. He was concerned that they may still be wet – I explained that I had planned ahead and packed an extra dry set. He felt better about that, but this exchange let me know that he was thinking. So I took that opportunity to ask him a few questions: “What does baptism mean?” I asked. “It means you follow Jesus,” he answered. “Oh, thank you God, I’m doing something right,” I thought to myself. Then he said, “But Mama, the other day you said you wanted me to be a leader. How can I be a leader and a follower?” What a great question! He said when he grew up he wanted to lead people to

follow Jesus. He looked over at the then 3 year old Bennett, sitting in his carseat – oblivious to our conversation – and said, “Bennett, when you grow up do you want to lead people to follow Jesus?” Bennett replied, “Yea!”

I want to be having that conversation now that they are 11 and 13 and when they are 16 and 18 and when they are 24 and 26 because I believe that my faith is pass-on-able. Just like Lois passed it to Eunice and Eunice passed it Timothy. (You need to know that in the time since I last preached this sermon, both of our boys have been through the water and claimed faith as their own. But I still keep passing it on because we’re not done yet.) This is not just a word for parents and grandparents and children. This is a word for The Church. Gail it’s a word for you. And for all of us. If the Church is to survive, we must believe that we can pass on the faith. Listening to the questions and engaging in conversations that really matter. For God’s sake, Gail, give them your faith.

Paul knew that the future of the church depended upon the transmission of faith – not just from Lois to Eunice and Eunice to Timothy – but from Timothy on to the next generation and on and on it goes even until today. Lois and Eunice appear by name in only this one verse in all of Scripture, but what a powerful verse it is - given what we know about Timothy – he was highly respected by his elders and Paul saw something in this young man that caused him to invite Timothy to join in the missionary journeys.

Joyce Hollyday, one of my favorite commentators, makes this observation:

It is not difficult to imagine Eunice and Lois rocking the infant Timothy to sleep in their arms, singing hymns of triumph, such as those that had come from the lips of Miriam, Deborah, and Mary, for lullabies. We can picture them vividly recounting tales of legendary strength and courage, introducing the young boy Timothy to the heroes of the faith, and teaching him to read and understand the scriptures. And when it came time for them to let go, they must have done so with pride and a flood of tears and prayers for his well-being. (Clothed With the Sun, page 135)

Do I make this sound simple? It is not. Is it too hopeful – too idealistic to believe that this just might work? Some would say yes. I say no. Will it always work? It's worth the risk. When I look at the faith that was handed down to me – oh you can't know how different my faith is now from the faith that was passed on to me – but I wouldn't trade the foundation, the sincerity, and the hope that my family and my church had for me. On so many issues of theology I have strayed from what was passed on to me – but not the faith. Will there be some who will not accept what is passed on? Yes – at least for a time – maybe even a lifetime, but do you still pass on the faith? Yes. Just as sure as am that in tomorrow's heaven my father will say to God, "Pass the jelly, Lois" that's how sure I am that we must pass on the faith to all of God's children. The Church Universal will not survive without it.

Paul's last words to Timothy in our passage for today were "hold to the standard of sound teaching . . . and guard the good treasure entrusted to you . . ." (Verse 14) Gail – that's a word for you. People of God – it's a word for us all. I suggest that tomorrow morning as we eat our toast, we give God thanks – thanks for the grace of faith and thanks for the jelly. May it be so.

The Park Road Pulpit

Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

**Pass the Jelly, Lois
II Timothy 1:1-14
June 27, 2010
Amy Jacks Dean**



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