

FAN YOUR GIFT INTO A FLAME

(2 Timothy 1.1-7)

Introduction

"Fan your gift into flame." I trust none of your presents have gone up in smoke!

One of my presents was a book entitled "Golfing with God". The first line read "there are 8,187 golf courses in heaven, "Sadly it's just a novel and I have no desire to play any of them, not just yet anyhow.

First let me give you a brief rundown of who I am before we look at Paul and Timothy and who they were.

At the age of 14 I heard God's voice (audibly) and naturally like Jonah I ran in the opposite direction to where I thought God wanted me to go. I kept on running until there was nowhere left to run, and then I fell in love with Ann. So I slowly turned to face God and find out what he wanted me to do, *slowly*.

Later on during a counselling session I told my Methodist minister about hearing God talk to me when I was 14. It was the worst thing I (shy and retiring Brian) could have done. "Oh well then you will have to start preaching!" Not what I had in mind.

I have preached in chapels, centres, schools, pubs and even on Redcar promenade! But I never thought I would preach in a C of E establishment. Mind you I have been christened and confirmed, in fact over the years I have gone after all these elements if it's of any use. But the only useful thing I did was give my heart to Jesus when I was 14.

Sorry if I have used the word preach as I realise talk is the more common word used here. I was told that when preaching you should always do it to yourself first, so I hope you realise that I am talking to Brian and if any

of this is for you then please accept it in the same spirit that it is given. Ok let's turn to Paul and Timothy:

Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him, Paul knows his time is short. He is not under house arrest, as before when we read all about his adventures through Luke's recording in Acts. Now he is on death row a convicted (by their standards) criminal, betrayed by a blacksmith called Alexander, let down by his so called friends in Asia as he knew it. With only a few friends left. Paul is in his 60's and knows his time is running out, it's time to hand on the baton.

Paul is also worried about the welfare of the churches he has started, this is the time of Nero and persecution of Christians is high on his list. So Paul wants to warn Timothy to guard the gospel, to persevere and preach it and if necessary to suffer for it. It may be Paul's last will and testament to the church at Ephesus, so he wants to get it right.

Paul would seem to have looked on Timothy as a son, He was proud of him, knew his limitations (his timidity) and yet he treated him as his deputy, his successor. Despite knowing Tim was timid, he rated the guy and why not.

Ok, I am sure that as we go through this book over the next few weeks, we will get other views on Paul and Timothy and their special relationship.

Gifts, Fans, Flames

What are your gifts? What are mine? Do we need a fan/supporter to get our gifts going and how far do we go with them? (the gifts not the fans), to the point of combustion?

We all have gifts from God or even A gift , BUT we have to open our gifts, just as we did at Christmas –otherwise we won't know what our gifts are, sounds so simple doesn't it?

Over Christmas I saw an interesting video made by "The National Lottery", they interviewed previous winners and asked them what was their best gift at Christmas following their wins.

There were the usual answers; one Lady said "my Cartier watch" and her husband said "I went out to buy everyone presents and came home with a new Range Rover!" honest at least. Most people said their best gift was sharing their winnings with family and friends. Not having to work at Christmas, spending more time with their families / friends. The gift of time and more freedom.

So materially – gifts can still bring out the best in people. Paul though is talking of spiritual gifts.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that "warms us up", that enables us to take the wrapping off and get down to the nitty gritty of our calling. The reason we are here this morning is an expression of our faith, our beliefs, our calling before God.

Our gifts are NOT just for ourselves; so we have to practice giving them away. Crazy but true. As we learn what our gifts are they bring a measure of self- discipline because we then have to act upon those gifts and release the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives so that others will benefit.

Gifts from God are easy to describe and list; music, singing, organising, cleaning, serving, praying, etc. We may all have these but some have specific areas. Such as praying; it is for everyone but not everyone has the gift of intercessory prayer. Gifts of: listening/counselling, preaching/teaching. The list is endless and I am sure you can think of many more.

But it's harder to place these gifts on each individual; that is where the Holy Spirit work is and why we need elders / leaders in our church to help us identify our own gifts/our own calling.

Gifts Galore: God is an abundant God and gives us plenty for our own use as well as others. After all when you are good at something (your gift) you can say "it's for the sake of the gospel" but it helps you as well! I am sure the fine musicians we have at St Mary's enjoy playing for themselves as well as US the congregation.

Lord Soper was a well-known Methodist minister who preached almost every week at Hyde Park corner. He said (and I got shot down in flames for saying this quote, so I hope lightning doesn't strike twice). He once said "If you are going to get up and preach, you might as well enjoy yourself."

Our spiritual gifts do us good, they are not just for us and they need a fan (the Holy Spirit? or a church leader/ friend) to get them going. The question is, Do we accept we have more gifts inside us waiting to be released. This is a good time of the year when we think of starting new things: keep fit, diet, new course at college. Why not a new gift?

Conclusion

So then? What are we to do with Paul's message; a man in his 60's, waiting for death in a condemned cell. A lonely man, isolated from his friends. Betrayed by many he thought were his friends.

Yet it's a message of hope for 2018 that we ALL carry gifts given to us by God. You may have experienced people you respect that have laid their hands on you, prayed for you and shown you that you do have special gifts to be proud of and used for your own good and the welfare of others. Or you may just have decided to start doing something that you never thought you could do and found that , actually you are very good at it.

To misquote the season, "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above, then thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love".

Don't be shy/ timid or fearful about your abilities. Be bold and strong in the safe knowledge that if God has given you a gift, who can stand against it?

As we start a new year. This is often mentioned in the pew sheet. "If you can help see Christine Ayers" if you have any inkling of talent that will help the church. There are lots of areas where your gifts can be exercised (careful how I said that). Think of all the gifts already in use, look around the church. It's warm and clean, the lights are on so someone has paid the electric bill. It's neat and tidy, well organised with all the reserve chairs stacked in the chapel. Music has been played and the computer has done its job of providing all the information required.

We need to exercise our gifts more often and especially the gift of praying for each other as well as for the poor, the homeless and the sick, the very old and the very young.

Finally to remind ourselves, let me finish with God's word. "So I remind you to fan the flame of God's gift that is in you. For God has not given us a Spirit of fear but a Spirit of power and love that enables us to exercise self-discipline and right thinking.

Let us pray.