

Psalm 145:1-13; 2 Timothy 1:1-14

“The Inheritance of Faith”

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Christian faith, by which we walk, has been passed on to us by “living saints” who have shared their faith with us. Someone invited you or brought you to church, taught you to pray, helped you discover the joy of singing, introduced you to the Bible and Christian writings, and someone modeled the Christian life of service to you. Such persons could have been a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, or a friend. No matter who it was, someone helped make the Christian faith understandable, believable, and urgent to each of us.

Paul described this in 2 Timothy, writing, *“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.”* Though faith can seem deeply spiritual and even mystical, faith is also something that has been modeled for us by others. Again, the words of Psalm 145 also describe this: *“One generation shall extol your works to another... [They] shall sing aloud of your righteousness.”* This is the inheritance of faith: one generation shares, sings and extols its faith to another.

During Lent, we meditate upon the humanity and model of Jesus, and so we turn the cross on the altar to reveal Christ hidden in the suffering of the cross. As we look to Christ in his humanity, we are shown how our lives can make a difference in the lives of others as we suffer with and for them.

This week we have the opportunity to think about three people commemorated on the church calendar: George Herbert, and John and Charles Wesley. George Herbert, who we commemorate today, was ordained into the priesthood in the Church of England, after study at Cambridge and serving in parliament for two years. As a priest, he served a small parish, caring for its members. Herbert was also a prolific writer. His poetry has been set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and is also in the ELW (#816) “Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life.”

His poem “Antiphon 1,” printed in the back of the bulletin, reads “The church with psalms must shout, no door can keep them out”; it a reminder of the place of song and hymnody in the inheritance of faith. As Herbert wrote, “Let all the world in ev’ry corner sing,” witnessing to the truth of Christian song that has truly traveled the world offering joy and the inspiration of faith.

Charles Wesley, who we commemorate tomorrow, was perhaps the most prolific hymnwriter in

the English language, writing over 5,000 hymns. George Herbert's words, "Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing," surely describe my experience of Wesley's music in Japan, because I often sang Wesley's hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" in Japanese at churches, the seminary chapel, and in small prayer meetings. Singing this hymn tonight is quite fitting, because during Lent we remember that in Jesus, "Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav'n [has] to earth come down!" Jesus continues to dwell in our humble humanity.

No less than seven of Charles Wesley's hymns are included in the Japanese Lutheran hymnal, and ten are included in the ELW. For Charles Wesley, music was not only for the praise of God, but also for the teaching of the faith. Hymns are a singing of the gospel message that inspire, strengthen and console.

John Wesley, like his brother Charles, was also influenced by the inheritance of the warm and joyful faith of Pietism and Moravianism. The pietism that profoundly influenced John Wesley grew first in Germany as a reaction the cold rational faith of Orthodoxy. In reaction, Pietism sought to restore the joyful proclamation of the gospel that was the inheritance of the Reformation, as a message of God's love for humanity revealed in its Savior, Jesus Christ.

Yet even for the strongest believer, there are times when we may not particularly want to go to church, and these are perhaps the greatest times that God works grace in us because we are in need of it. John Wesley recorded one such time in his journal on May 24th, 1738.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a [meeting] in Aldersgate Street, where there was one reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the human heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

Though Wesley had already done mission work in the American colonies, and was laboring to reform the Church of England, he found himself shut out of the pulpits of that church. Yet, for example, when the bishop of Bristol tried to limit Wesley's activity by telling him that his itinerant preaching was disturbing the good order of his parishes, Wesley responded, "The world is my parish."

John Wesley was concerned that the inheritance of the faith must become "my" inheritance and "your" inheritance - living in the human heart throughout the world. Faith, he said, is "equally

strong and equally new” because “it passes now even as it has done from the beginning, directly from God into the believing soul.” The gift of faith is always the same because it is God’s gift to humanity.

This is the faith that Paul described as having been passed to Timothy from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. This is the faith that Wesley himself experienced at Aldersgate through someone reading Luther’s commentary on Romans. Faith is passed on to us through the voices, writings and living witness of others. It is the warm and living presence of Jesus Christ.

Wesley wrote, “a person may assent to three or three-and-twenty creeds...and yet have no Christian faith at all,” because faith does not consist in orthodoxy or correct theology, but exists “deeper still, even in the hidden[ness] of the heart.”

George Herbert, and Charles and John Wesley, are examples of the inheritance of faith, people who lived to communicate in word, song, worship and prayer, using all of the means of grace and the entire tradition of the church, in order that the faith that lived in them might be inherited by us, living in our hearts today.

During this season of Lent, may you give thanks for the inheritance of faith – the living presence of Jesus – that lives in you, not as cold textbook theology, but as a living Savior who gives you blessed assurance that your sins have been forgiven so that you might live with joy for others. Amen.

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George Herbert, “Antiphon 1” (*The Temple: Sacred Writings*, 1633)

**Let all the world in ev’ry corner sing,
My God and King.**

The heav’ns are not too high,
His praise may thither fly:
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.

**Let all the world in ev’ry corner sing,
My God and King.**

The church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out:
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.

**Let all the world in ev’ry corner sing,
My God and King.**