

Timothy 1:1-14

Psalm 31:1-9

Where Do I Put My Trust?

There is a video clip of Christian song writer, Rich Mullins, where he says, "...to identify fully with Jesus Christ who I claim to be my saviour and Lord. The best way that I can do that is to identify with the poor. This I know will go against the teachings of all the popular evangelical preachers but they're just wrong. They're not bad. They're just wrong. Christianity is not about building an absolutely secure little niche in the in the world where you can live with your perfect little wife and your perfect little children in a beautiful little house where you have no gays or minority groups anywhere near you."

Rich Mullins died in 1997 but was known for writing the song *Awesome God* that is still sung in churches and heard on radio stations to this day. The refrain of that song is

Our God is an awesome God,

He reigns from heaven above with wisdom, power, and love

Our God is an awesome God

Rich Mullins conveyed that his trust was in God and that God was with those who are most vulnerable and so we need to be to.

I don't have to tell you that we lived in a time of polarization of politics and policies. It feels like that there is nothing we can do to change this. If you are like me, there is a sense of helplessness. I don't know what to say or what to do. I struggle to have conversations as I know I don't have all the facts and even when I do think I know at least some facts, another person with their interpretation of events and their "facts". I am at a loss. And yet...yet...

As I pondered the scriptures from both the first verses of Psalm 37 and the scripture reading from 2 Timothy 1:1-14 I see words that are given to describe God who is powerful and has not left us to our own devices. There are verses in the Psalm that are about God's actions in times such as we are experiencing now,

¹ Do not fret because of the wicked;

do not be envious of wrongdoers,

² for they will soon fade like the grass,

and wither like the green herb.

- ³ Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
- ⁴ Take delight in the Lord,
who will give you the desires of your heart.
- ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in the Lord, who will act.
- ⁶ The Lord will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.
- ⁷ Be still and wait patiently before the Lord;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out wicked devices.
- ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
- ⁹ For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

This Psalm is about trusting God in times when the wicked appear to have the upper hand. Regardless of what it looks like to us, the psalmist is writing words that speak of trusting that God has got this. Our work is to live out our lives in faith and in trust.

Yet it is so hard to wait on God, to trust that God has got this. One click of the remote or the scrolling of our social media feeds tells us a story of challenge and chaos. And though there are many people that we have to deal with from family to friends that have very different opinions from what we may hold, what is deeply disturbing to me is the polarization and division among people of the Christian faith. Of course, this is nothing new either. We have been living in a bit of a bubble the last few decades but there have been wars fought in the name of religion. The Reformation in the 15-16 hundreds was a time of great upheaval in the church and out of that came the Presbyterian Church and other denominations.

In our own time there is a fault line being created between many churches. There are the churches where women and children have a place in their perfect little family with their beautiful homes and where there is no room for families that look different. And there are churches that affirm vulnerable people, including minorities, the poor, the addicted, the people that make our churches messy and unpredictable, yet beautiful in the diversity and community that can be created.

What is really concerning to me is the rise of Christian Nationalism and our neglect in speaking out against it. This is something that I have brought up before. To share again, Christian Nationalism is the belief that the secular government should favor Christianity or even be replaced by it. This is a concept that started long before the current political climate around the world, but it has gained considerable traction in the last decade. It is disconcerting because it has a narrow view of faith and who and what is acceptable in

God's sight. For people who would find themselves in this stream of understanding there is little to no room for women to be autonomous, there is no room for those who do not have wealth, and there is no room for anyone whose sexual orientation do not fit within the heterosexual binary of men and women.

I believe most every one is aware of the assassination of American political activist Charlie Kirk. It was a terrible act and the person responsible has to be held to account. There is no disputing that. The struggle comes in that Mr. Kirk is being held up as a Christian martyr, and that is concerning because Charlie Kirk was a Christian Nationalist. You may ask what has this got to do with Canada, but there were vigils held in Canada to honour him. The October 2nd edition of the Windsor Star led with a front-page story about a vigil held to honour Charlie Kirk where hundreds attended. The headline read, "*Martyred for his Faith*". Thing is he did not die for his faith in Jesus; he died for his belief in Conservative American White Christian Nationalism and that is a different thing. Again, let me reiterate that he should not have died at the hand of another. The point here is about what kind of faith are we called to live out as we try to be image bearers of God.

Going back to my point, the two somewhat opposing understandings of what it means to live out our faith are often melded into the same thing and they most certainly are not the same thing. People in the Christian Nationalism movement and in very conservative congregations do not represent the faith that I believe many Christians live out. Many Christians live lives of compassion for those who have little, showing kindness rather than judgement to those who were the very people Jesus spent time with. Jesus fed the hungry and healed those whom others wouldn't even touch, such as a leper and a woman who touched his cloak and was healed, or the woman who was bent over and he healed on the Sabbath in the Synagogue.

Which brings me to the reason for bringing all this up at all in the context of the scripture readings for this World Communion Sunday, a Sunday that at its core is about unity in our faith. First of all, these scriptures are about trusting that God is working in and through all of this uncertainty and strife. We have story after story in the scriptures of how, as people reflected on their experiences, they could see how God was at work. Then there are the people in our lives who have been our Christian mentors. They may be family or friends; they may be people in our worship community.

In the letter to Timothy we can read as Paul imparts important stories and words to encourage and teach Timothy. We also know from the writing that family helped to bring about the deep faith that had Timothy pastoring other Christians. His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice obviously impacted Timothy's understanding and choices or they would not have been named. I ask, who in your life has impacted your understanding of faith? Think about who may be looking to you to learn or at least see what it means to be a Christian. One thing that is for certain is that learning about and living out our faith happens in community, and it comes about from experience.

Paul, Lois, and Eunice had all been teachers and mentors to Timothy, but he also had the Spirit of God within him, and that is something all of us have access to as well. This is both reassuring and a little terrifying. If we have God's Spirit then it means that we have power. That power is to show mercy and compassion, to love, and to advocate for justice for those who have no voice. This is not about making our lives better, it is about making all lives better. Responding to the hurts and the hopes, restoring people to wholeness in community, and then rejoicing with them and for them.

It means that we have to find our voice for justice in the face of a kind of Christianity that leans into prosperity for those with money and power and neglects the needs of those on the margins. It means that we must remember that like Timothy we have been not been given a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

We have a holy calling, not according to our works but according to God's own purpose and grace. Grace. That is what is to define our faith and the way we see and treat others. Jesus cared for the least of these and that then is who we should be caring for, those whose lives are more challenging physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually.

Do not be ashamed of your faith, put your trust in God. God's got this. We have to open our mouths and hearts, but God's got this. We do this in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you...to us as Christians, called to share this treasure of love and grace with others, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us. Amen.