

“I am grateful”

**1 Timothy 1:12-17
2019**

September 15,

In Wednesday’s devotion from The Upper Room’s, *Disciplines*, Hirho Park wrote: “What has Jesus called you to do? How has the overflowing grace and love of God enfolded you and empowered you, especially in times when you have made poor choices out of ignorance or pride or spiritual weakness? You aren’t alone . . .” and her writing continued in relation to today’s reading from Timothy.

Paul wrote the first letter to Timothy while traveling on the road from Macedonia to Nicopolis in northwestern Greece. Timothy was a well-known associate of Paul. Paul referred to him as “. . . my loyal child in the faith . . . “ (1 Tim. 1:2). Timothy had been listed as a co-writer of more than one of Paul's letters.

Paul wants to remind Timothy of a little bit of his history. All of Paul's initiative and creativity were going into defending the Jewish faith, by any and all means; which could have included the sword. Paul's own plan for his life made him "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence" (1:13). Paul would have had no trouble debating with those Jewish people who had begun to follow the teachings of that itinerant rabbi, Jesus, but he wanted to do more. His zeal meant he had the need to obliterate, to crush those he considered heretics. Much like those in modern society who believe they are always, always right, and that others are always, always wrong.

Are you like Paul? Do you see yourself as being similar to Paul?

I think I could consider myself a little like Paul! Paul thought he was a good Jew, just like I thought I was a good Christian. I had attended SS from the time I was 4, first at Chalmers and then at Chedoke. I learned my bible stories, but I wasn’t very good at memory work. Heck, I even taught a SS class or two. After SS, I even stayed for the church services, but occasionally I did doze during Don Neil’s sermons. I attended youth group on Friday nights and Sunday afternoons. But then, as I got older things changed; girl friends, late Saturday night dances – I stopped regularly attending church.

God had another plan for Paul's life, a plan that was merciful and sure. Paul learned that God did not need any defenders, all God wanted were repentant hearts and new disciples. That is where God’s plan and Paul’s life intersected. While Paul had intentions to destroy “the way”, he learned as he sat in the house on the street called Straight, that God had something different in mind for him.

Paul was transformed and the zeal he had before was now directed to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul had been transformed and he was now able to see what is good in the faith of others. He would be able to quote from pagan poets, secular playwrights, and other sources of ancient wisdom to make his point

that everything points to love and mercy, and that love and mercy finds its best expression in Jesus.

It began with self-examination, Paul's self-evaluation. God's word is not a museum where we gaze at the exhibits. It is a mirror where we recognize ourselves. That's why in his letter to Timothy, Paul does not try to present himself as one who was always right. He recognizes that he was lost, he is now found, not because his testimony makes him a trophy but so we might see ourselves in his story - and then praise God, immortal, invisible, who is the source of all good things.

But un-be-known-st to me, God had other plans for my life. It began with Les Renault and the year he helped plan the Billy Graham crusade in Hamilton. After our family attended one of the evening services, members of the church, specifically Les and the clerk of Session, Crawford, began noticing a difference in me; something I couldn't see. John-Peter arrived and introduced me to the lectionary and I began to regularly read scriptures and devotions. Because of these life experiences, I began to evaluate my life. This self-evaluation helped me to better understand what God's plan was for me.

The plan, as it has unfolded led me to Knox College and then being called to Gordon. It took time, for me to realize, what God's plan was. I had resisted for some time, about 45 years, but eventually I saw what Paul saw. I saw that everything points to love and mercy and that love and mercy finds its best expression in Jesus.

Paul attempts to give encouragement to Timothy by reminding him that he was the first sinner, the persecutor of the faith, but "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim 1:15).

This is God's creativity. It is God who has taken the initiative. God reached out to Paul and God reaches out to us, God instructs us, and God's grace is shared with us. This passage speaks to the essentials of faith and the saving action of God.

God's creativity continues into the present age. It is God who has taken the initiative to establish and maintain a relationship with humanity. God's love has resulted in mercy, even to Paul, who calls himself the worst of sinners, and he uses himself as an example for others. God is reaching out to all humanity so that all may become heirs of the promise made to Abraham.

The parables of Jesus speak of God's intense, loving search for the lost. And our own testimony is most powerful when we cease to try to use creative, persuasive arguments and instead testify to our own lost state. And tell of the miracle that we were found, and that God has healed our brokenness. This is the message that is spoken through all of scripture. We are saved by the grace of God, which is God's gift, to all who accept it.

Are you like Paul? Do you see yourself as having some of Paul's traits? Sometimes I think, I know I do. But because of God's grace and mercy I know I am loved. Are you grateful like Paul was? I know I am! Amen.