



“TRUST CALL”

SCRIPTURE 2 TIMOTHY 1: 1-14

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

Sunday, October 2, 2022, World Communion Sunday

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

2 Timothy 1:1-14

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

1:2 To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1:3 I am grateful to God--whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did--when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

1:4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

1:5 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.

1:6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands;

1:7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

1:8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God,

1:9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

1:10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1:11 For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,

1:12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1:14 Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

The Word of the LORD
THANKS BE TO GOD.

(video of race start) (split screen on youtube, full screen in sanctuary)

Being a cross country runner takes a lot of work. These women are the best collegiate Division I runners in the country at the NCAA championship last year. This race is what they have been training for day after day, week after week, year after year.

Their bodies have learned some things over and over again. One of them is that they can keep going when it is hard. Another way to say that is that discomfort is a message to them in racing conditions that they are indeed, giving this race what it demands. If you are not uncomfortable in a XC race, you are not fully engaged in what XC is all about—it's about learning what you're made of, that you can do things you hadn't believed you could do, that you have inner resources that are just waiting for you to tap into them—to show you that you are strong, resilient, and capable to amazing things.

All of these women have had coaches tell them they believe in them. All of these women have had teammates and friends and family tell them they believe in them.

The thing that makes a great XC runner though is how you navigate the hardest terrain of all—your own thoughts about yourself.

When the gun goes off at a XC race, you might be surrounded by 100s of other women—but they are not really your most formidable opponents. Your most formidable opponent is

you! And the inner critic¹ that says–you’re tired, you can’t do this, you are out of your league, it hurts too much, you are not going to make it.

That inner critic has to be befriended and it has to be engaged in your training and your racing for a XC runner to tap into their true potential and their true capacity.

Our inner critic is there to protect us really–they are there to help us avoid things like shame, pain, and rejection. So it’s not that we need to try and silence our inner critic totally, it’s just that we need to know how to be in conversation with them.

Sometimes when we have had people who were not supportive and encouraging in our lives–their voices are what the inner critic always seems to be able to channel. And those people knew right where our most vulnerable places are about our deepest fears about ourselves.

But trying to just suppress or ignore the inner critic never works. You’ll just end up exhausted and it will still be going strong.

But getting to know your very own inner critic creates space for you to understand them and to let the relationship be one you have more agency in. When they start telling you what you can’t do, you can tell them what you can do and what you are doing. That’s one of my go-to self-talk lines when I am racing – “You are doing it!” It’s not just “you can do it” - It is “you are doing it! In real time, you are doing it.”

Sometimes I can also engage in some gratitude with my inner critic. Knowing she wants to protect me from harm. I say thank you for all the ways you have taken care of me through the years, today I feel ready to take this risk so I don’t need you to protect me right now.”

Sometimes I also spend some time understanding what is really important to my inner critic–what are her values. What is important to her? Sometimes those things are important to me, too, and sometimes they are not.

For instance, my inner critic can push me out of passivity when someone has said something I need to deal with–something I would rather avoid. My inner critic can tell me bad things are going to happen if I just let that go. Or that I am not the person I say I am if I don’t do something.

¹ For a great article on the “Inner Critic” see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/09/20/how-to-deal-with-inner-critic/>

She values something I value, honesty and transparency and integrity. She is pushing it from fear. I want to lean into it not from fear, but from hope and belief that relationships grow stronger when we can be honest with each other and build trust.

And that's where this letter to Timothy comes in. It's not just a letter to Timothy—it's a letter to a faith community. In fact, by the time this correspondence was created, that faith community probably had some structure. There were probably church officers, like elders and bishops.

Timothy was struggling. That is clear. Tears, fears, jeers. He seemed to be well acquainted with it all. And it seemed to have been impacted his belief in himself to actually keep going and stay the course.

This letter is really great coaching.

Timothy—I see you. I see how hard you are working.

Timothy—I see the stress and the strain, I remember your tears. I see not only how hard you are working, but how painful this work can be sometimes.

Timothy—I see you!

To be seen by another person—especially by someone you love and respect, is a powerful force that can propel us through some really difficult times.

Think about a time when you were struggling. And what a difference it makes when someone acknowledges how hard it is and that they see how hard you are working.

The next move that the letter writer makes is important for us today, Grace Covenant.

Before we get to that next move, keep in mind that whoever wrote it, they want to evoke the social currency and social capital of Paul, but it probably was not Paul—it could have been—but this letter writer used a very different vocabulary than Paul normally used for most of this letter. Whoever it was, they were trading on Paul's authority and Paul's deep relationship with multiple church communities—and that was an accepted practice so no real need to tarry here much.

So the next move the writer makes after saying I see how hard this is and how hard you are working is, I believe in you. You were made for this. You have everything you need to do

this. The laying on of hands, the strong ancestral lineage. You have what you need to do this.

Grace Covenant, our faith community has been touched by God's Spirit to be a leader in some very difficult work. The work of building a community of faith that does not center white ways. The work of building a community of faith that is not captive to the illusion that white ways are the right ways. The work of building something that none of us have ever experienced before. We don't have a blue print. We are building it as we go. And that is hard work.

As we kick off our pledge drive for 2023—perhaps the most important thing for us to remember is that we trust God to provide us with everything we need for this work. We've been called—that is clear. And so now we have to trust that call and let it be the voice that guides us when the discomfort spikes in times of transition, in times of pain and loss, in times when the unknowns outnumber the knowns.

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and love and self-discipline. The discomfort and suffering that comes when we stretch into the challenges of being a community of faith—those are signs that we are fully alive and engaged in the life God made us to live.

We are not made for stasis or for the status quo, we are made for transformation, we are built for change. Our bodies are constantly shedding, flushing, changing, letting go and regenerating. Those are the elemental skills we are called to trust in times like these.

And then Timothy is told something that can be so easy to forget in hard times—the community, the life of faith, that difficult stretches—those are actually treasures. Those are the places where the sound teachings and the belief and the holy imagination that faith gifts us with—that's where they get to be fully used.

Like a race being where you finally get to apply your training.

Times of change and unknown in the life of faith—these are the times when we really get to use what we practice—this is when we draw on the treasure of our trust in God.

We are blessed to have a Session who leads by example. They are practicing every day what it means to live in a faith community with a spirit of courage, with a trust in God's call to our collective life.

100% of the Session has pledged already to kick us off on our 2023 campaign. We have already raised \$95,830 towards our 2023 budget. Our hope is to reach one million dollars by Christmas. That will put us right where we need to be moving into 2023—when traditionally a few more pledges trickle in during January and February.

My family pledges to GCPC because we believe in what God is doing in this faith community. I am increasing my pledge this year, because God is calling me to dig deep—to guard the treasure that is building beloved and liberative community with all of you. I see God's fingerprints every day in things I hadn't thought were possible and we are doing it!

We are doing it, Grace Covenant!

We are practicing every day together what it means to heal our community, our bodies, our psyches, our relationships, to heal every part of us of the disease of white supremacy. We are finding new ways to be well together. We are doing it!

And in times like these, we are called on to stretch even more, to dig deep into our inner resources and to trust that God built us for times like these.

When I came to GCPC 6 years ago I thought this place seemed too good to be true. Now I know it's not that GCPC is too good to be true, it's that GCPC is a place where we actually believe we can be true to a higher calling than just the same old thing churches always do. What sets us apart is our willingness to do really hard things together. That doesn't always feel good, but it feels faithful.

Grace Covenant, I believe in you. I believe in us. God has given us a spirit of courage and a bright future unfolding right before our eyes. As your pastor, as your coach on this leg of the journey—I see you, I see your strength, I see your determination, I see your tears and your hard work.

And I see the Holy Spirit at work in us—and that Spirit is not going to falter when the race is on the line. That's when She really starts to shine!

Thanks be to God.