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Title: *Christ, Our Mentor*

Text: 2 Tim. 2:1-15

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

Remind them of this, and warn them before God
that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which
does no good but only ruins those who are listening.
Do your best to present yourself to God as one
approved by him, a worker who has no need to be
ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

- 2 Timothy 2:1-15

In today's lectionary passage from 2 Timothy, Paul takes on the role of a mentor. In his previous letter – 1 Timothy – Paul took on the role of: teacher and community organizer. 1 Timothy contains practical information for early Christians on how to organize the church and Christian worship. Paul is in prison now, so he is no longer concerned with practical information. He moves on to matters of the heart... words that a person could live by...

When Paul speaks to Timothy in this letter, I believe that Paul is well aware of his role: *his role as a mentor*.

What is a mentor?

The online dictionary, Wikipedia, defines mentor as: "A trusted friend, counselor or teacher, usually a more experienced person. Some professions have 'mentoring programs' in which newcomers are paired with more experienced people, who advise them and serve as examples as they advance." [1]

One of my great mentors, John Butcher, just finished writing a book that he said is his magnum opus. He says: "To write this book has taken my entire life of 73 years this far and especially the 40 years since the Moon Landing when I was simultaneously blown away, released, and energized to live more freely by one of my mentors!" John and I have shared some of our mentors with each other. In an email he wrote to me this week, John said: "One of my mentors

was Art Ploetz, the produce man in Piggly Wiggly market where I was working during high school. Here was a man who had his own Grocery store in the mining town of Jerome, Arizona, and when suddenly the price of copper dropped and the mine shut down and the population went from 15,000 to 50 people becoming a ghost town overnight. Art and his wife moved over the mountain to Prescott and became produce man at Piggly Wiggly. He knew how to take Life as it comes. He had a zest for life, great sense of humor, and taught me many practical things. Hardly a week goes by that I do not think of Art and smile." Then John said: "I doubt very seriously that Art knew he was mentoring me at the time - nor did I - but for many years his life and example have served as a model and inspiration for me."

We meet mentors in a variety of places. Often we have mentors in education, mentors at work, and mentors in the faith. As we approach thanksgiving, think of a mentor that you have in each area (education, work and faith) and write a letter to at least one.

Now for the kicker – *I believe that the art of mentoring is becoming a lost art in our society.*

Former Ronald Reagan speech writer, Peggy Noonan, laments what she calls the national need for “adult supervision,” saying, “there’s kind of an emerging mentoring gap going on in America right now ... a generalized absence of the wise old politician/lawyer/leader/editor who helps the young along, who teaches them the ropes and ways and traditions of a craft.”

In my life and ministry, I have been blessed to have wonderful mentors who continue to help me cultivate skills in preaching, pastoral care, administration and other disciplines – people like my father, Robert Dykstra, John Butcher and many others.

Yet – I am well aware that many do not share my experience. Many people grieve the absence of a mentor... someone who can offer guidance and insight.

St. Paul is one who recognizes great value in mentoring. He does not describe himself using the word “mentor,” but it is clear from his behavior that he sees its value... and he leans on mentoring as essential to building relationships of depth in community... and in developing the early church.

In his letters to Timothy, it is clear that Paul is looking to Timothy as his *protégé* – the one who will continue his mission and message after his death (cf. 4:6).

Interestingly – we do not know... from scripture... or from church history... whether or not Timothy agreed to succeed Paul in the gospel ministry; we do not have a response from Timothy to Paul's letter! However, it is obvious that Paul's ministry was carried on by someone. Who carried on Paul's ministry? We cannot say for sure.

Earlier in the text (cf. 1:7), Paul recognizes Timothy's apprehension. There is a reason for Timothy's fear; Timothy is worried that he will end up imprisoned like Paul. Also, Timothy is green, unseasoned. He is gaining his competence... and he has yet to claim that he has been called by God. Paul sees this... he sees that Timothy is reluctant to embrace his gift and vocation for gospel ministry.

And so, what does Paul do? He speaks to him as a mentor.

Like a wise mentor, Paul uses a variety of images... and multi-layered insight...

He describes a person of faith as:

A soldier of Christ (2:3-4)

An athlete (2:5)

A farmer in the field (2:6)

A criminal of Christ (2:8-10)

I think he uses a variety of images... metaphors... that can probe his prospective protégé into a deeper level of knowledge and faith. Sometimes we need to hear something framed in different ways in order to truly hear what is being said, don't we?

Which metaphor speaks especially to you?

A soldier of Christ (2:3-4)

An athlete (2:5)

A farmer in the field (2:6)

A criminal of Christ (2:8-10)

What does the metaphor, which you selected, say about your faith and identity?
How does Paul's mentoring (capability) draw you closer to God?

When I hear Paul's words, I have to admit: I am drawn to some sentences more than others. It's the same as advice we receive from mentors: Sometimes a mentor's advice falls on deaf ears. Other words just stick... and we hear a message at just the right moment in time that we need to hear it.

After reading Paul's words, the burning question for me is: what in the world did Timothy ever do with what Paul was attempting to convey to him before Paul died?

The longer I sit with the question, I wonder: perhaps there is a reason why we do not know...

Who is Paul's protégé? Is it Timothy? Or is it you and me?

We need to reclaim the lost art of mentoring in our world today. Serve as a mentor: a mentor in education, a mentor at work, a mentor in the faith. Or maybe you are called this day to seek out a mentor. We have many in our own congregation!

Paul reminds us, ultimately, that it is Christ who is our mentor, encouraging us to form helping relationship with others who so desperately need it.

So, stand up! *Remember Jesus Christ—that is our gospel, for which we suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained.*

I pray all this in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentor>