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A man named Paul sits in prison in Rome. He has been here before. In fact, he has been imprisoned many times before. But this time is different.

Paul has a feeling of certainty that he will not make it out alive this time.

While the Bible never says exactly how or when Paul dies, contemporary

literature written around the same time as Paul indicates that he was

beheaded in Rome, under the tyrannical reign of Emperor Nero, around the year 65 AD.

As Paul sits in prison, he reflects, he prays and he writes, as he has done before. In this letter that is our second lesson, Paul is writing to a young companion named Timothy. Timothy comes from a Greek father and a Jewish mother named Eunice. Eunice eventually converts from being a Jew to a Christian. She's not the first in her family to do this; her mother

Lois did the same thing. And so, Timothy's mother and grandmother were Christians.

These women passed on the Christian faith to Timothy, and they also instilled in him strength of character and fortitude to stand your ground in the face of adversity. This was very important, because all this was going on at the time when Nero was emperor...who eventually became famous for burning Christians alive to illumine his gardens at night. So Grandma Lois and mother Eunice raised Timothy to hold fast to his faith, even in the face of torture, persecution and death.

The two met when Timothy was just a young man, during Paul's second visit to Timothy's hometown of Lystra. They hit it off right away, and Timothy quickly became a follower of Paul, and then an apprentice, and then a trusted companion, and finally a fellow missionary, a founder of new Christian churches.

Paul and Timothy were close. Paul even lists Timothy as co-author of several of his letters, like 2 Corinthians, Colossians, and Philippians. Paul says of Timothy, “I have no one like him.” And so as Paul sits in his dark prison cell in Rome, and as Timothy continues his missionary work on the outside, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and starting up churches here and there, Paul thinks about this Timothy...

What influences has Timothy had that have made Timothy *Timothy*? Not genetic factors, like who his eyes were brown and his hair black, no, not that sort of thing...spiritual influences....how did Timothy grow such a strong faith? Who planted the first tiny seed of faith within him? Who watered that seed of faith? Who helped it grow, who nurtured it?

Clearly, Timothy's mother Eunice and his grandma Lois are two such influential people. Clearly, their faith stamped Timothy's, and shaped it and molded it. Has your faith been shaped and molded by any of your relatives?

Are they in this very room (for First Communion) today? Can you name this woman or that man who first taught you about Jesus' love? Was it your mother, your grandmother? Your father, your grandfather? An uncle, an aunt?

Or maybe it was a friend. At the end of Paul's letter to Timothy, Paul asks Timothy to greet friends they have in common....Greet Prisca, Paul urges, and Aquila, and the whole family of Onesiphorus....and then Paul relays to Timothy greetings from other friends....Eubulus greets you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the members of their congregations...they all say hi to you! Do you have such friends like this, friends that are faithful, not only to Jesus, but also to you? Do you have friends who send you greetings when you are far away, who pray for you when times get tough, who visit you when you are down and out? Are you such a friend?

The point is this. The church did not begin with just a bunch of random individuals all working apart from one another to accomplish different goals. No, the church began with groups of people, and these groups eventually came to be called congregations. And these things they held in common eventually came to be called creeds. And the ways in which they worshiped eventually came to be called liturgies. And the rituals they held to be sacred eventually came to be called sacraments.

So this brings us to today, thousands of years after Paul was beheaded and Timothy was stoned to death. Here we are today...Lutheran Christians gathered together on a Sunday morning, not as a random collection of individuals...but as a people of a common faith, faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith was passed on to us by people like Eunice and Lois.

Give pause today to think of these people in your lives...the ones who have pushed you and pulled you and at times carried you...the ones who

held the hymnal for you when you were little and underlined the hymn verse  
with their finger....the ones who taught you about David and Goliath and  
Ruth and Naomi and Jesus and his disciples....the ones who carried you on  
their hip when they collected the offering...the ones who let you ring the  
church bell when you were still so small your body flew up in the air...the  
ones who first encouraged you to be a lector, to play the piano, to be a youth  
advisor...

Who were your Eunice's, Lois's, your Prisca's and Aquila's? Who  
were the ones who passed their faith on to you, so that you are here today,  
sitting in that pew, listening to this sermon, hearing these words that Jesus  
loves you so very, very much, and there's nothing you can do to change that.  
It's the same message of good news that Paul and Timothy proclaimed two-  
thousand years ago, and the reason this message is still passed down through  
the generations and still proclaimed from pulpits is simply because it's true.