

PASSING ON THE FAITH

Where does the energy for faith come from? Where does it come from - the energy to live for God, the energy to stand up for what is right and true, the energy to hang in there when the going gets rough? When I look at my own life I see that energy for faith often comes through other people. The source of that energy, of course, is the Holy Spirit, but time and time again the Holy Spirit transmits that energy through other people. Perhaps that is why the Bible reading for today instructs us to *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the Word of God to you.”*

The first ones to speak the Word of God to me were my parents. My parents were Christians. Knowing my parents, they probably spoke the Word of God to me as soon as I was born. Three weeks later I was baptized. Just as parents today promise to bring their children to the services of God’s house and teach them the Word of God, so my parents made their promise to God. And they kept that promise. I don’t remember too many Sundays when my father sat with me in church because he ushered every Sunday. My mother taught Sunday school. Every evening we had family devotions. They lived their faith and that made an impact on my life.

This cloth I am wearing is a stole. Pastors wear stoles as a symbol of their ordination. When I was about 5 or 6 a Sunday school teacher suggested that I become a pastor in the church. I don’t know the teacher’s name. I cannot even picture her in my mind. But her words shaped my life. It was through her that God first called me to the pastoral office. Teachers, never underestimate the power of what you say. What you say can literally shape a person’s life!

Another person who spoke the Word of God to me was George Soeken. He was a farmer, tall, strong, and did not have much formal education. He taught the high school class on Sunday morning. We met in the church basement around two 8 foot tables. There were usually about 10 to 12 of us. George deserved to be called St. George. We were more interested in discussing Friday night’s football game than we were in talking about the lesson for the day. And I have to admit, we were more intent having fun than we were in listening to George. But George hung in there with us and he made sure we got to the lesson. He joked with us and he prodded us on. We always knew that George would be there for us.

The Bible reading says, *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the Word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”*

Remember them - the people who spoke the Word of God to you. Imitate their faith because faith gets passed on from one person to another. That’s how God works. God is a “down-to-earth” kind of God. God works through flesh and blood. People. Ordinary people. Flawed people. God works through them, through their faith. As they speak the Word of God. As they live according to that Word. That is how God works.

The Bible reading goes on to say, *“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace.”* The world is full of strange teachings. You can find all kinds of teachings out there. Some is good and some is not. But what we really need is the grace of God. It is grace that strengthens the heart, that provides energy for faith.

As I think about the people who spoke the Word of God to me, what stands out is grace. They were *grace-givers*. Whether it was George Soeken putting up with us crazy teenagers or that nameless teacher through whom God called me to be a pastor in the church, these teachers were *grace-givers*. These

teachers brought the grace of God to me. Through them I experienced the love of God, I was accepted and affirmed. And it is through that kind of grace that faith is born and energized.

Our God is a God of grace. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*, says the Bible reading. That is to say, just as Jesus Christ brought the grace of God to people 2,000 years ago, so he brings the grace of God to people today. Jesus Christ went to the cross for you. And he rose from the dead for you. And he is here today, in this Supper, for you. You belong to God. You are precious to God. You are loved by God. God's grace is for you and that grace is what energizes your faith.

Isn't it amazing how God works? Isn't it amazing how God works through people - through ordinary people to embrace us with grace and energize our faith? I think it is absolutely incredible.

And you know what - we get to do that for others! We get to help pass the faith on to others! It takes a whole congregation to raise up people of faith. It takes all of us, working together, to energize the faith of others. We will have lots of opportunities this fall to do that. It takes a lot of effort, I know, but it will be good! It will be very good!

It will be good because we will be sharing the grace of God and helping to energize the faith of others!