

Sermon for Grace and Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, VA
Proper 22, Year C, October 6, 2019
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Our Spiritual Inheritance"
2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

God, open our eyes, so we can see; open our hearts, so we can be wholly devoted to you [paraphrase from hymn "Cry of My Heart"]

when you are new in town or meet a new group of people, a common question often is: "Where are you from?"; that can be a powerful question, because it can open up a wealth of information about a person's background, family, and connections—all things that can reveal a lot about a person

much of who we are can be tied up with where we are from; that's perhaps one reason why so many people are interested in genealogy; it can be very enlightening to learn about your ancestors; my Grandma Taylor left us a booklet of her recollections of family stories tracing us back to the town of Castle Cary England, where we visited this past spring; Lynn Ellen did some research on my father's side of the family, and we learned that they settled Shackelfords VA; we'd have been one of the First Families of Virginia, except my ancestor Shackelfords decamped to Georgia, and arrived there too late to be a First Family of Georgia

our reading from 2nd Timothy speaks of our spiritual genealogy, our spiritual ancestry; this is what we were exploring two Sundays ago at the Interim Event topic of Grace and Holy Trinity's heritage; but this also has to happen on a personal and family level; it is closely aligned with what we've been talking about in our *Heaven, Hell, and Hollywood* forum series, which will conclude next Sunday; many parents and grandparents spend time and effort planning for the material and financial inheritance they will pass on to their children and grandchildren: money, property, things; but do we plan as much for the spiritual inheritance we hope to pass on to those who will follow after us?; and not just to our biological families, but to the larger family of the church?

look how Paul addresses the question of heritage as he writes to Timothy, one of his younger co-workers; Paul recognizes that he himself has benefitted from the spiritual inheritance of his ancestors; then he praises the faith of

Timothy's grandmother Lois, and that of his mother Eunice, which continues in Timothy; who do you have to thank for your faith? have you thanked them, or thanked God for them?

I recall seeing a great visual image depicting a similar idea about our spiritual inheritance; it was in Chartres Cathedral in France: a set of four beautiful stained glass windows, beneath the south transept rose window, the side that gets direct sunlight all day long; it depicts the Hebrew prophets Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, as very large figures, taking up the majority of the tall windows; and on their shoulders ride the Christian evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as much smaller figures, depicted almost as if they were children riding piggyback on them; because of their Old Testament counterparts they were able to see much farther than they could have otherwise; so, let's add to that image: imagine us riding in a third tier upon their shoulders, still higher, and able to see even farther, because of our Old Testament and New Testament predecessors

these stories and images all answer the question 'where are we from?' as Christians; so what does it mean for us to have this ancestry?; it means that we have received a rich and full inheritance, but one of which we must avail ourselves; we avail ourselves of this inheritance by reading and internalizing the stories from the Bible and by applying them to our way of living and thinking; only by doing that will this inheritance make a difference in the way we live our lives in the present; only by doing that will this inheritance make a difference in the world now; only by doing that will this inheritance make a difference into the future, to those who come after us and to whom we have this great responsibility to hand on this inheritance

recall that at every Baptism each of us promises to "do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ;" what have you done personally to help pass on this spiritual inheritance?; what could you do to give the next generations to come, in your family, in this parish, in this community, the benefit of a spiritual piggyback ride upon your shoulders, so that they may be able to see even farther and better than we can?

I want to leave you with one more image; you may be familiar with the way that genealogical software programs give you the ability to print out family trees; there are two main types of these; first, the ancestors tree builds upward from you as an individual, showing all of your ancestors in the shape

of an upside-down pyramid: you, at the bottom, then above you 2 parents, 4 grandparents, 8 great grandparents, etc.; picturing that may help us visualize just how broad is the spiritual inheritance each one of us has received—remembering that this inheritance has come from teachers and pastors and friends, as well as from our blood relatives; and how all of us together, when we combine all our spiritual ancestors together, what a great cloud of witnesses that makes; what a great spiritual inheritance we have all received, collectively

the other kind of family tree is the descendants tree; it forms downward from you as an individual, showing all of your descendants in the shape of a right side-up pyramid; you, at the top, then below you your children, your grandchildren, your great grandchildren, etc.; picturing that may help us visualize how broad a spiritual inheritance each one of us has to pass on—also remembering that this is not limited to our blood relatives, but to all those whose lives we touch and influence; and think of all of us in this church, each being the recipient of a large inheritance, and each being responsible for the inheritance we pass on; all of that coming down to us and passing along from us; it reminds us of the importance of this present moment in the life of faith—at this very point where the two pyramids coincide; what a big impact we can have on the world, by passing on our faith

the future of the church and the continuity of our faith depends upon us to do this well—actively to pass on our faith; it is a very big responsibility; God has covenanted with our ancestors, and continues to covenant with us to make sure our spiritual inheritance continues; with God's help and with our diligence we can both receive and pass on this important spiritual inheritance, keeping our faith alive for generations and generations to come