

## **Sermon: A Sacred Thread**

Silvia Purdie

Thanksgiving Service, Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Sunday 1 September 2019

Readings:    1 Timothy 1:12-19                Luke 14: 7-14

Through all our lives runs a sacred thread,  
a silken gleam of glory.

It stretches back before we were born,  
before galaxies were born,  
to the eternal heart of God.

God dreamed us as he weaved us  
bone and sinew, nerves and veins  
woven together in our mother's womb,  
body, mind and soul.

The thread is made of the same substance  
in you as it is in me,  
but it finds quite different expression in each of us;  
unique colours of gift and personality,  
unique textures of call and response.

For most of us, most of the time, the thread of God is hidden,  
lost in the stuff of life,  
woven over by everyday things,  
cluttered by society's expectations.

Some of us treasure the sacred thread above all else;  
we recognise it running through scripture  
and recognise it shining most of all in Jesus.

Those who do, grasp it,  
cling on to it as the fabric of our lives shakes and tears,  
find it strong and steady.

Many of us ignore the sacred thread, or actively dislike it,  
and the thread begins to fray.

Disengaged from the rest of life the thread falls away  
its flow dries up.

Those of us who value it orientate our lives around it,  
weave our decisions and our possessions in line with it.

We trust it above all else  
for we know ourselves becoming who we truly are  
only in the love and power  
grace and renewal  
purpose and peace of God.

Our theme for the month of September is Faith, Life and Work. We will be exploring aspects of how God has made us and called us. We start with this idea, this image of a sacred thread, in the claim that we are all purposed by God. We will be opening this out in various ways, reflecting on the roles we play, the work we do, our attitudes to our money and our ideas about what we're good at.

One of the problems when we come to the Bible is that we read about people who seemed to have these things sorted out, and we think to ourselves – well that was all very well for them, but that doesn't apply to me. And, to be fair, the people we read in scripture did live a mighty long time ago in places very far away from here. Why would we even expect threads of connection between them and us?

Well, that's my job, I figure, to lay down for you points of connection, to suggest to you ways of sharing in the same story.

And that is part of my own calling, my own knowing about what I'm here for, what I'm good at, what I'm trained for and appointed for. And, again, that's all very well for me, I'm a minister,

I've been Called with a capital 'C'. What about everybody else who has to live in the real world with real jobs? What does God's call have to do with the rest of it?

We will get to that, this month. For now, I want to look to Paul, and his spicy little letters to his good friend, the young man called Timothy. The books of first and second Timothy find us near the end of Paul's life. After his astonishing adventures and amazing adventures he is now stuck, traveling no more. He is imprisoned in Rome. Not in a nasty cold dark dungeon, but a jail none the less, under house arrest in a friend's home. People can visit him and bring him paper and pens, (or whatever it was he used instead of paper and pens). But Paul finally has to face up to the reality than no more can he just hop on a boat and go visit a struggling church in person. He hears of appalling conflicts and false teachings, and he just can't do anything about it any more. All he has is his paper and pen. All he has are the people he has invested in. All he can do is encourage them, maybe boss them around a little, but it's up to them what they do with Paul's teachings and orders. Paul has to let go, and let other people take up the batton. Or not. Some of Paul's friends drop the ball, ditch the faith. Paul is gutted about that. But there's nothing now than he can do.

Timothy, however, is young, and Paul writes to build him up, give him confidence in himself and the gospel truth he carries.

Not that things are going particularly well in Ephesus, where Timothy is a young leader. In fact, it sounds like things are pretty chaotic, possibly even disastrous. Timothy would like to leave, anywhere would be easier, but Paul says, stay. I have appointed you. God has appointed you to where you are. Claim the authority you have been given. Trust the giftings you have been given. You can do it!

When you read the letters to Timothy you might notice that Paul's advice on church management is highly conservative. Find good solid stable people, men specifically, to keep the peace, and tell those roudy women to shut up. Not Paul's normal strategy for leadership development in the early church. It's all very 'decently and in good order'. Very Presbyterian – but more on that another week.

Our passage today is Paul telling his own story, of how he experienced the sacred thread running through his life. For Paul this is a story of his own ignorance and unbelief being transformed by God's mercy and acceptance. For Paul it's all about Jesus, all about mercy. And at every turn Paul likes to direct our gaze back heavenward – to God be the honour and the glory, God who is immortal and invisible, the source of all life and purpose, power and goodness ... it's not me, it's all God.

The fascinating thing in this passage for me today is how Paul moves from his story to Timothy's story. Paul honours the sacred thread in his own life and then he honours it in Timothy's life. For Timothy this thread of calling came through the prayers of his grandmother, Lois, for him. This is such a wonderful affirmation of the calling of grandparents in every culture and age ... pray for your grandchildren. Hold the sacred thread for them. See it in them. Affirm it, nurture it.

Others also prayed for Timothy and prophesied over Timothy. His calling in leadership was an outworking of this. His story is one of walking into what had already been declared over him, and that knowing gave him strength and boldness, faith and a good conscience.

As we celebrate our Thanksgiving Communion this morning we attend to the sacred thread that binds us heart and body and soul into God's purpose. As we hold the bread and wine in our hands we grasp hold of the silken thread of glory that shines through all we are. We affirm that we are who God has made us, as unique individuals and together as family, part of the great cloud of witnesses, together woven into the kingdom of God.