

As a part of this service of Ordination and Installation, it is customary for a charge to be given to those who are being ordained and installed as Ruling Elders today. This message does that, however, I also want to assure that the contents of this message are not only for them, but for us all as we all seek to draw nearer to God and connect with God in a deeper way.

Before we actually get to the reading of 2 Timothy 1:13-14, I want to begin with a comparison, and that comparison is that we are all like sheep in need of a shepherd. The reason for this comparison is to help lay the groundwork for how “anointing with oil” (or what we may also call the laying on of hands) became such a symbolic practice in the church. In the end, we are to take away that one who has been anointed, is one who has been set apart for special service to God and through the anointing receives empowerment for that service. Okay, on to the comparison.

Oil has been used by shepherds for ages in three primary ways: to repel insects, to prevent conflicts and injury, and to heal wounds. Insects can kill sheep, torture livestock, and even drive them insane. Sheep run, hide, and toss their heads up and down for hours. They forget to eat and sleep. Oil keeps the bugs at bay and keeps the flock at peace. During the mating season, oil is used on the nose and head of a ram because it causes the bashing rams to glance off one another rather than crash into. They still get hurt but not as bad. And for the wounds that do arise, from thorn pricks, rock cuts, gashes from a horn, oil prevents a wound from becoming infected.

Like sheep, we too have wounds. Wounds of the heart that can come from disappointment. If we are not careful, these wounds can lead to bitterness. We too need to be treated. Like sheep, we too need preventative care and a healing touch. Max Lucado, in his book *Safe in the Shepherd's Arms*, writes, “The large portion of our problems are not lion-sized attacks, but rather the day-to-day swarm of frustrations and mishaps and heartaches. You don’t get invited to the party. You don’t make the team. You don’t get the scholarship. Your boss doesn’t notice your hard work. Your husband doesn’t notice your new dress. Your neighbor doesn’t notice the mess in the yard. You find yourself more irritable, more gloomy, more... well, hurt. You don’t sleep well, you don’t eat well, and you may even hit your head against a tree (or something or someone).” Like sheep, we too have a shepherd. Psalm 100:3, “God made us, and we belong to God, we are God’s people, the sheep

God tends.” The Lord tends, protects, and heals. And because we have a shepherd who cares for us and can heal us, we, like sheep, are to go to God.

Think about this. What is the posture of a sheep before the shepherd. For one to be anointed with oil, one must stand still, lower their head, and let the shepherd do their work. 1 Peter 5:6 says, “**be humble under God’s powerful hand so God will lift you up when the right time comes.**” Sheep don’t understand why the oil repels the flies, or how the oil heals the wounds. All they know is that something happens in the presence of the shepherd.

Yes, something indeed happens in the presence of God. Yes, something indeed happens when we encounter the teachings of Jesus. The Apostle Paul recognized this, and after his faithful conversion, he dedicated the rest of his life to sharing this good news with everyone he could, hence all his letters to churches, including his protégé Timothy. What does Paul say?

Read 2 Timothy 1:13-14

What does Paul say here? Paul is commending Timothy to an unashamed commitment to the gospel and embrace all that may come with such a commitment- the good, the bad, and the ugly. It is important to highlight that at the heart of Paul’s message is a warning against false teaching. Because there is a lot out there bidding for your attention and devotion and they will do anything to pull you in. Paul says, “**Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, *alluding to the truth that what came from him was of Christ and nothing more or less...* from me (no one else) in the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.**”

As Paul leads up to verses 13 and 14, he speaks of how important it is to have a commitment to God. And he does this in a remarkable way. He gives thanksgiving to those in his life that have run the race, fought the fight, and kept the faith themselves. Verse 5 he states, “**I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.**” Lois and Eunice exemplified a commitment to God and because they did it has been passed on to you. A positive sign of care and love is passing on that which will feed eternally. And what Paul states next is also important. Verse 6 he continues, “**For this reason, *because this faith and commitment now live in you,* I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.**”

Two quick, yet very important, points to note here.

The Greek syntax of the word “rekindle” suggests a continuously burning flame or a close connection with something. When we enter into a relationship with God, we celebrate the lighting of a fire that is to never go out, a connection that is never lost. Hence the imagery we may hear when talking to a “newborn Christian” or someone who has just had a mountaintop experience with God, they are “on fire for God.” Like a real fire, it must be tended to and cared for, wood added, oxygen provided, etc. Anyone who has ever tended a fire knows it requires commitment and faithfulness, just like the relationship between sheep and their shepherd. At times, it may even be necessary to rekindle or recommit to the flames. How? Paul suggests prayer and the laying on of hands.

This is the second point. The practice of “laying on hands” is no simple matter. Again, likened to an anointing, which is an age-old spiritual practice God performed to mark someone as “holy- set apart.” God anointed King Saul, King David, and King Solomon. God anointed Aaron as priest. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. The word “Christ” means “anointed one”. And we celebrate because by God’s grace, our faith in him makes us “holy- set apart”. Paul’s use of the practice in his charge to Timothy highlights the resources God makes available for an unashamed commitment to the gospel and the extraordinary past and present manifestations of God’s grace announced through the gospel, **“for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”**

With the same intention and purpose, the church today through ordination, sets apart with prayer and the laying on of hands those who have been called by God through the voice of the church to serve as ruling elders (deacons and ministers as well). When we practice the laying on of hands, we are asking God’s blessings of power and love and self-discipline and grace, for the one kneeling in trust and humility that indeed something happens in the presence of the shepherd.

That something is a healing, a protection, a wholeness, a kindling, a rekindling of our commitment to serve and glorify God faithfully. And what does that look like? To be committed to God is to stand on and be faithful to the teachings of Jesus, for all others are knock offs. All other teachings are false and shall not be trusted. True teachings are those rooted in the spirit of God and made of love and grace and peace and hope. Therefore,

love with all your might the goodness of God's gifts. And how is it that you will be able to do this effectively? "With the help of the Holy Spirit living in you."

Yes, something indeed happens in the presence of God. Something good. Something true. Something worth our while, worth our humble worship.