

# Disciples Take Their Faith Home

Part 5 of Sermon Series:

*What Disciples Do*

a sermon based on

2 Timothy 1:1-14

and delivered on

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As we continue contemplating what disciples do, I'd like to share my experience with Eileen. Eileen was a member of Bethany of Fox Valley United Methodist Church (my first pastoral appointment). Eileen lived at Elmwood Terrace Nursing Home. Even though I was appointed to that church as the associate pastor for children and youth ministry, the senior pastor had asked me to do the visits for those who couldn't come to church. It wasn't a pass the buck moment. Although she was and is an outstanding preacher, she just didn't feel like she was gifted in this way. Because she wanted the best for these people, she allowed me to take on that responsibility. I enjoy those visits. I thrive on them. Maybe it comes from my past experience working in care facilities seeing how a visit – just the fact that someone visits – revealed the human dignity that was so easy to get lost in the busyness of a day. Maybe it's because I have that sense that just being there is often competence enough.

So that's how I met Eileen. Thinking back, I don't know how long she'd been a member of the congregation. The congregation itself celebrated its sweet sixteen as a merged congregation. I don't know how long she had been in the nursing home before we met. But even twenty years later, I can remember her room. I remember where I sat and where she sat. And I remember our conversations. Not all of them – and not all of the exact details – but I remember the conversation that always found its way in.

Eileen would tell me about her youth. Now, having been born in 1906, she was ninety-three years old when we met. So the stories of her youth reflected that: the stories about cranking the car that would haul her family to the small Presbyterian church in the country. I guess that was fitting, Eileen Anderson (her maiden name) was a scot by heritage {She'd do that brogue.} She told me about the cold trips to church in the snow; walking when the car wouldn't start. That was Sunday. The rest of the week was different: sort of.

At dinner time in the Anderson home (we're talking country "dinner" which means about one o'clock in the afternoon) – at dinner time everyone was expected to come as father read Scripture and led prayer. When I say everyone, I mean everyone – hired men (men who were themselves illiterate) included. If you weren't there for devotion, you didn't eat. Probably couldn't get away with that for the hired hands nowadays, but it speaks to something. Doesn't it? Eileen's home was filled with faith. It was filled with her father's faith. It was so important that that faith be shared that he insisted. Even those hired hands – as Eileen described it – looked forward to those devotions because unable to read it for themselves they were invited to hear the word of Scripture. Moreover they became a part of the household in those moments – their presence was as essential as anyone else's.

Because her father lived out his faith at home, not in private seclusion but in the midst of the whole home – because living that faith was something that you could count on – you knew when it was going to happen – because your strength depended on being there to engage that faith lest you go hungry, it became a priority. It formed who you were. I know it formed who Eileen was.

The stories that we repeat, are the stories that tell more. In the time I knew Eileen, I can't ever remember hearing her complain. She didn't complain about the smell of urine that would sometimes waft in from the hall. She didn't complain that she was stuck in that room. Instead she was filled with life talking about how she'd been formed in faith. How she became a Methodist, I'm not entirely sure. Her married name was German, so I suspect that her husband had been a member of the Evangelical congregation that would eventual through denominational and congregational mergers bring her into that fellowship.

Eileen was special. Hers was the first funeral at which I would officiate. In that, I was blessed – no wondering about her relationship with Jesus – my own spiritual confirmation that I didn't need to doubt my relationship with Jesus just because I hadn't had one of those transformative moments – an epiphany of faith – merely the assurance that it was okay to grow up in faith.

When I think back to that passage from 2 Timothy that we heard a few moments ago – when I think back to Paul remembering Timothy’s “sincere faith, a faith that first lived in (his) grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice,” I’m reminded just how much that my faith was shaped not just by my grandmother and my mother taking me to Sunday School and church, but by Eileen and her father.

In my house, we went to church on Sundays. But that was about it. I remember once – it was the only time I can remember a pastor coming to our home – he’d come for dinner. My brother and I had been set at the kid’s table; and my mom put the food down in front of us. As my brother and I started eating, my mom said, “Wait, we haven’t prayed yet.” I was probably six or seven (no more than eight). It just came out, “We don’t pray.” My mom was horrified.

Faith wasn’t absent. We had a set of Bible story books, which I now have. It just wasn’t very intentional. What if it were? Especially nowadays?

Our world is so busy. We rush from one thing to another – one project to another – one event to another. Sometimes we blame those times we neglect faith on those other demands. “I’m not going to be in church Sunday because my granddaughter has a soccer game in Timbuktu.” “I have family staying over Saturday, so I won’t be in church.” I’m not saying this to scold anyone. But I’m reminded of what one of my professors said in a class about Christian formation and worship. He told us (i.e. the pastors in the class) that everything we do in worship teaches. I think we can extend that to our families. Everything we do at home detaches. We teach our children, grandchildren, our out of town relatives what we believe is important by what we do.

We tell our kids to go to school, because it’s important for them to be educated. We get our children inoculated, because it’s important to protect them and the rest of us from disease. We bring them to church and Sunday School, because it’s important for them to know Jesus loves them. I’ve heard the excuse from some in my own circle that they don’t take their kids to church because they want them to be able to make their own decision. Guess what? They will. I’ll admit: I gave my daughter a choice about attending church on those weekends she was with me. She could go to the first service or the second service. But I needed to teach her it was important.

Think about this. Jesus didn’t just start preaching at thirty years old. The only story that we have of his youth begins “Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.” (Lk 2:41) Not every family did that. But it was essential to them. Because it was, we hear later in Luke 4:16, “When (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.” If Jesus, the Son of the living God – Jesus, the incarnation of God himself, needed to be raised in a home where faith was active and needed to be in communal worship every week, why would we dare to deprive ourselves?

It’s just what disciples do. When the disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith in the Gospel reading that we just heard, he told them a parable about servants. What he was saying is that servants don’t serve their master expecting to be served in turn, but that they do it because it is who they are. Disciples take faith home, because it is who we are. Disciples take faith home because we want those whom we love and meet to know that same hope that we find in Jesus, who loved us so much that he was willing to suffer on a cross – even when he could have avoided it and justified it. But he didn’t. His love for us is that great.

We owe a debt to the saints who have gone before who brought faith home: for grandmothers and grandfathers, parents, friends like Eileen because their lives have brought us to good news. It’s the simplest way share faith. Just to live it. You don’t have to be articulate or convincing in an argument, just let it be who you are – especially with those closest to you. So even when you’re in Timbuktu, there’s probably a church there. Go invite those whom you’re visiting. When you have guests, go to church and invite them. Whether they seize the opportunity or not,

you've taken faith home and showed what is important and joined the ranks of Lois and Eunice – of Mary and Joseph – names celebrated in the Church and in Heaven. AMEN