2026-10-25 … 6.30 Evensong Sermon … Mrs Jane Rylands

Ecclesiastes 11, 12; 2 Timothy 2: 1-7

A fortnight ago, and apologies that you've got me again this time, I did a swap with Chris so that he could lead the children's service last week

A fortnight ago we had a reading from Proverbs, supposedly written by Solomon in his middle age and this evening we have a reading from Ecclesiastes supposedly written by Solomon in his old age when he has apparently got increasingly cynical and cranky (Song of Songs written in his youth obviously!)

And we have a letter from Paul … or have we?

Actually, we might have … but 1 Timothy and Titus, the other 'Pastoral Epistles' probably weren't

Hopefully you're not too confused yet!

I think we can see the common link in the two readings – and actually with Proverbs last time – **in Ecclesiastes 12 v 12** we have **'Remember your creator in the days of your youth …'** and in **2 Timothy 2 v 1 'You then, my child …'**

So what do we have in 2 Timothy? A letter to Timothy encouraging him to take up a work of ministry carrying on the teachings of Jesus, specifically as taught by Paul, Paul knowing he has come nearly to the end of his road.

I'm going to look at three things – **first look at what we know about Timothy, then look at what we might pick out from the seven verses we've heard and finally what we might take away from that.**

Timothy is a child of the Christian faith through his mother and grandmother, both named at the beginning of this letter, Eunice and Lois. He is a young man when he begins to travel with Paul and Silas somewhere in the 50's AD. He co-authors several of Paul's letters. He may have been nervous – in **1 Corinthians** Paul asks the church to make sure they put Timothy at ease. And he may have suffered with stomach issues – Paul encouraged him to **'use a little wine for your stomach's sake' –** and for this reason Timothy is who you invoke for stomach and intestinal disorders.

He became the first Bishop of Ephesus and the apocryphal 'Acts of Timothy' written 400 years later says that he was stoned to death aged 80 in AD 97 for trying to stop a procession in honour of the goddess Diana by preaching the Gospel.

I'm not convinced by the age accorded to him there, it seems to make a bit of a nonsense of this letter if he was born in AD 17 – that would put him at about 35 when he starts to travel with Paul and 45 plus when Paul addresses him here.

To me it sounds as if Paul is encouraging a really quite young man – certainly not someone just 10 years or so younger than him (Wikipedia has Paul being a similar age to Jesus)

Paul says:

- **Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus** …. Not strong trusting only in himself, but Timothy must know the redeeming love of Jesus and depend fully on that
- What he's heard from Paul (no doubt in Paul's mind, clearly, and as he states elsewhere, that what he taught was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!) – **Timothy is to teach, and teach to others, implicitly to others that he deems faithful and trustworthy, who will teach still more others, so that the good news is spread**
- **Share in suffering like a good soldier** …. Not sure that I would encourage a young person into a life of ministry by telling them to expect and deal with suffering, but then that hasn't been my experience when it was Paul's. 'The soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer' …who do you think he means? – I think it should be Jesus but I am not sure that Paul isn't referring to himself!

- **Be an athlete – but play by the rules**. The rules presumably being the things Paul has taught him, being of course what Jesus inspired in Paul. **PTO**
- **Be like a farmer who gets – or ought to get – first dibs at the crops** … is Paul saying if Timothy takes on the mantle he is passing to him then he will be assured of a closeness with and strength through Christ?
- **Finally – my interpretation anyway - Timothy is to begin with Paul and his teachings and then he will pick up his own understanding, given directly to him by God.**

Paul thinks a lot of Timothy, but has Timothy shown signs of wavering in his commitment? Other travelling companions of Paul have been drawn away from The Way by a desire for the ways of the world, they've 'loved the world too much'

What is it about Timothy that Paul thinks appealing to him with metaphors related to the army, sport and farming will attract him to the task? The first two at least seem to suggest a young man's ideals.

Do we think about our own legacy of faith? It's not easy is it? I for one have not knowingly lead anyone to faith, or even been an influence in pointing someone to Christ who didn't already know him.

If we are right to think that Timothy is a young man I think he, Timothy, might be a poster boy for young faith leaders. We should take a line from Paul's book and encourage our young people to take a lead in faith; we shouldn't be surprised when real youngsters speak words of wisdom to us whose youth is a thing of the past – especially if we have passed on sound teaching for them to build on.

Amen