

A Sermon for DaySpring

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Born in Faith

2 Timothy 1:1-4

Covenant Day

October 5, 2025

Today's New Testament passages are about faith and the struggle for faith. We can all relate. At some point in our lives, there is both faith and the struggle for faith. In Luke, the disciples are reeling from the high callings of Jesus' teachings on their lives. "Increase our faith," they blurt out. Meanwhile, in the epistle, young Timothy is struggling. Paul writes to him, "I remember your tears, I remember your heritage, I remember your earnestness, your sincere faith; rekindle the flames of this gift from God."

The theme is about faith and the struggle for faith—for sincere faith, rekindled faith, increased faith. It seems we can all make this our invocation. We can say with the apostles, "Lord, increase our faith!"

When we do so we are joining the founding community of DaySpring, as we remember on Covenant Day. There came a moment on the journey to begin this church when each person of the little group from the beginning had to genuinely ask the question of themselves and one another, "Do we have enough faith to do this, whatever this is?" There would be a lot of those moments in the years that followed.

This was not a professional group of seasoned church planters who'd been to the church planter convention and gotten the church planter certification. They didn't come with consultants and a strategic plan to reach benchmarks and a certain socio-economic demographic of the city of Waco. They didn't have any beautiful buildings or a lovely church grounds or a budget to speak of besides whatever was in their wallets they took out and put in the center of the table. For a while, they didn't have a church name. "79th Baptist Church" was proposed. They didn't have a website (there was hardly any such thing anyway in the early 90's). They didn't even have a pastor (please don't get any ideas). And truth be told, and I've related this story at newcomer's gatherings because it always frames it for me, truth be told, they weren't even sure they wanted to do this.

To do this they needed faith—sincere, rekindled, increased faith. That's what we need when we face any challenge in our lives, whether it's one we choose or whether its one that comes knocking.

There were about 20 of them. What they had were tears, some each carried in their own hearts, some they shared in common—tears from church hurts and some unique to each one. This would be from the very beginning a safe place for tears. They also had memories. St. Paul invokes the legacy of faith of Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois, naming them by name. They had people, we all need people, who inspire us and encourage

us, even when things aren't going well—especially then. When they're not going well in marriage, we need people who've been down the road a little while; when they're not going well in our health, we need the stories of people who endured surgeries and rehab and chemo's. And when they're not going well in faith, we need faith pillars, those saints and teachers who show us the way and show us a better way.

Before they became pillars for many of us, this little mustard seed sized community had pillars in their lives who showed them a better way. And they had the embers of a vibrant faith, still hot, but in need of a fresh wind to blow to bring them back to flame. What more could we need?

Still, they had to decide—they had to discern—what is this? It's a question that sits before every community of faith at every generation from the very beginning. What is this?

It could have been just a supper club—a group of friends getting together to share stories and laughs and some good food sometimes. A supper club is a wonderful thing—we need people to break bread with—to feast with. Food is God's love made delicious, and eating together is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet that awaits us. A supper club places few demands except for show up, bring something, tell a good story. But it's not a church. A church is not just a supper club.

It could have been a political action or social services group, likeminded individuals who discuss and organize in favor of candidates or policies, locally or beyond. There's an energy to politics that can draw on aspiration or anger, feeling like you're part of something bigger than you are that does some good in the world. But the little group that would become DaySpring were too wildly diverse politically to even consider the option, I suppose. Instead, they learned to be friends across differences, to leave their differences out on the road when they could and to be generous with one another when they couldn't be left outside. That is a community practicing a kind of politics you don't see much anymore, and yet still, that's not a church. A Church is not a synonym for an activist agency for politics or social services. It can do a lot of good, but it's not a church.

They had to decide. They had to discern. Are we a supper club? Are we a political action committee. Are we nothing? Nothing is always an option, and it's become the default of a society increasingly fragmented and desperately lonely. Sometimes the easiest path is to stay focused on your own business, your own interests, and your own activities, to star in a theater of one. Society is structured that way in many ways—there's plenty to do to keep busy, plenty of passive entertainment; bowling alone is not so bad. Community, of whatever kind, is harder, and riskier. Being alone is easier; it's not a church.

A church is a community in which shared meals begin at the Lord's Table, where the body of Christ is broken and given and received, the ministry of the church rooted in the study of scripture and submission to the Holy Spirit, where you are bound to one another as the body of Christ in ways that you might have never chosen on your own. A Church is more

than a voluntary assembly of like-minded individuals who happen to be breathing the same air. It is a witness to the world of a different world or at least the hope for it. Its signs are cross and resurrection, baptism and eucharist, hospitality and prayer. Churches sing together, if not always on tune, they still sing.

Someone in the group said, perhaps with all this in mind, “We should start a church.” And the rest of them said, “No way!”

It’s too hard, it’s too costly, it’s too risky. We aren’t qualified. Do we have the faith for that? What would we do anyway? Just worship and let God lead us to figure out the rest? Can you do that? Can you be a church that is a place of rest and renewal, not a hive of increasing busy-ness all the time? How would we do it? Even little seed-sized churches have jobs that need to be done. What do we do about those jobs? Just write them on a chart and everyone puts their name up there to take a job for a while? That wouldn’t work. Would it?

Someone else asked, as I imagine it, “And what would we do about a pastor?” Every church needs one, right? What do we do, It’s the early 90s so probably our future pastor’s still in college down at A&M, which is definitely no Baylor, of course, but everyone down there is so smart and good, and way above average in every way— (everyone around the group nodded, “yes, this is true.”). Someone said, “You know, even better, would that fellow Burt take a risk on a small church like us?” “Maybe someone could call him and see. Pat, you do it. No one can say no to you.”

“Ok,” they said, “so, it sounds like we actually have what we need—a bit of a plan, something of an idea. But what do we need the most? What’s the missing piece—the straw the stirs the drink. The wind that fills the sails, the earthquake the shakes the heart? The courage to take the first step? The Something-Something beyond our everything?”

Faith. It’s always faith. This church was born in faith. Everything that matters is born in faith. Faith isn’t quantifiable. Faith is always about the next step you take without knowing exactly where it will lead or what it will require of you or whether you’re up for it. That’s faith.

When the disciples blurted out, “Jesus, increase our faith!” what was being asked of them was bigger than they were, and they knew it. Jesus had taught them about radical forgiveness—the kind that binds people together despite all that they’ve been through. Radical kind of forgiveness. Father to prodigal son type stuff. Forgive seven times kind of stuff. That’s asking a lot of anyone. This community that Jesus seems to imagine is going to demand something big of every person who is a part of it, in one way or another at some time, more than we have. “You’re going to have to help us here, Lord. We’re not sure we’re up to this.”

It's a rare person who doesn't come to such an intersection in their life. "I'm not sure I'm up to this." Face unemployment, the end of a long relationship, a change in a family system, a long walk to the hope of a new life in a new place, a new opportunity, a dreaded diagnosis.

"I'm not sure I'm up for this." This is the crucible where faith is forged—in the furnace of trial, testing, and opportunity. Sometimes we have no choice but to face what we must face. Life just brings those pitfalls and those sharp turns, and now you're in it, even if you didn't ask for it. In it, God will give you a sincere faith, to face the challenges in trust in the goodness and provision of God. There are stories around this room that blow my mind. They bring me to my knees. This isn't just a church that was begun with a single act of faith; it's story after story of "I didn't know if I was up for it; I didn't know how things would turn out, but I knew, I just knew what I had to do. God was in it; God was with me."

I had to go.

I had to stay.

I had to speak.

I had to forgive.

I had to try.

I had to get out of bed one more time.

I had to follow Jesus.

Today, I want to honor the dinner table conversations over the last year as many of you discussed, discerned, maybe worried about, prayed about your part in the Giving Back, Building Forward campaign. It may not be the very biggest thing in your life you've ever encountered, but it's something that so many of us share. And I want to honor what's happened around the dinner tables.

For some of us, perhaps, the decision that we made was fairly easy. I know for others it was not. The path wasn't clear, but the calling was—we will be part of this. Now, how will we do it? What will we trust God with as we do? I know this conversation was repeated all over this city and county. And it may still be. My prayer is that may God bless those conversations. May God honor them--those discernments. May God bless them by honoring those commitments and the struggle and the step of faith to know what to do. And through all of that, to give you the gift of increasing faith.

When I say this church was built on faith, that's what I mean, not the resolute faith of someone whose confidence in the outcome sets their chin against the wind, I mean the faith that says, "Uhhhh, I don't know about this. I don't know if we're up for this."

It would be easier to be something less than a church. But, I need more than those things. I need encounter with the sacred that calls me beyond my fears and calls me out of myself. And you do, too, and we need one another. We need a church. We need to be church. What a gift.

Jesus was always talking about seeds and soil when he talked about faith. Like a mustard seed. That's how much faith you need. Like a mustard seed. It doesn't look big, but it can do awfully big things. It can uproot mulberry trees and plant them in the sea—I guess if that's a thing you want to do. Or, even better, leave the poor mulberry alone. A little faith in God can uproot fear and can heal old resentments, can bring settle to anxiousness and selfishness, or heavy doubt in yourself that you wear or doubt in others or in God. Plant that seed in good soil and watch what happens.

In so many ways, that's the story of this place: a little seed planted in some good soil, and then watch what happens. You happen. You, with your buildings and those yet to be. You, with your Chart and your names all scratched on there. You, with your heart and your mind and your casseroles and your songs and your tears and your laughter soaking into the walls and your memories of the people who made you who you now. And you and your open arms to those yet to come, no matter where they come from.

You and your sincere faith. You and your rekindled faith. You and your increased faith with every step you've taken. And with every step of faith yet in front of you. I'm proud of you, and I'm humbled by you, and with eyes wide open, watching in all the tears and joy that is surely to come because it always is, to see what God does next and what God does now in his beloved children who walk together in faith.

Thanks be to God. Amen.