

Psalm 145: 1-13 and 1 Timothy 2:1-7

What does it mean for something to be called "living?" My title, "A living faith" invites us to think about your own faith...how might we call our faith "living?" Does it breathe? Does it change and grow? Have you seen your faith evolve? Do you still question and seek answers...what do "feed" your faith? Do you pray, worship, study, write...what do you do to keep your faith alive? Does your faith sometimes need reviving?

Let us be in prayer: Living God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

This little text....this piece of a letter, written in the name of the Apostle Paul, but probably not really written by him but that is OK...written AS Paul to his apprentice who was mentored by him named Timothy. I think this little excerpt...is radical.

Listen to the very first line: *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for EVERYONE, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.*

You have to get a picture of the way things were for them at the time of this writing. It was written late in the first century, after Jesus had died. These early Christians were experiencing persecution and resistance in their efforts to speak about this Jesus, because Jesus had taught a different kind of truth. It was a truth that countered the ruling powers of the day...the Roman Empire had not yet embraced Christianity, in fact money, power and military strength was the order of the day....does it sound familiar?

But this letter tells Timothy to ...PRAY for EVERYONE. Even the rulers who were ruthless in their domination...pray for them. This is radical! Think for a moment about what that means...to pray for those who oppose you...or to pray for those who oppress you? Or to pray for those politicians whose words infuriate you?

Pray for EVERYONE. Fred Craddock points out that what this did for early Christians was to give them some space...Paul was NOT asking them to pray in submission to their rule...Jesus had certainly demonstrated nonviolent noncompliance...but by praying for those who persecuted them....THEY were not drawn into the negativity but allowed some peace and dignity to continue their preaching and living...of their faith.

Perhaps praying allowed them to not succumb to the political power struggles but with compassion, they had a different kind of influence on their communities....

Perhaps some of you are already thinking of our own politicians. Certainly we all may feel a little squeamish if asked to pray for them? But perhaps we too might find that there is something in the praying that gives some space...it might be a kind of buffer of love, because really prayer is a kind of extension of love, right?

A UCC minister, the Rev. Lizette Merchan Pinilla who serves a church in Oklahoma but is from Colombia, South America...writes in regards to this text and says that Paul, or whoever wrote in his name, was trying to clarify for people what it meant to have a "living faith" even in the midst of corruption and violence. She asks that each of us *be* the living and breathing faith that champions justice and dignity for all...to *be* the living and breathing faith that God asks us to be..

I think we are at a very exciting time. We have some deep challenges in our world today and yet I see a kind of life-giving renewal emerging! In spite of some really big messes in our political system and issues of conflict around the world...I am also hearing a kind of current for positive change. Are you? I see it in our schools as locally our educational leaders explore programs that engage and instruct. Wow, I was so impressed at the open house at Hawlemont...children were so excited showing their parents their classrooms and how they learn through caring for farm animals!

I hear it in our communities where local farmers are encouraged to flourish and to make healthy food available to all. I sense some exciting creative changes in producing energy and in caring for one another.

I have been hearing it in churches, as yes, there are definitely growing pains as demographics change but there is something going on that feels exciting and our own church is on the brink of exploring this! How exciting that we will be imagining into the future today! I welcome these efforts to allow ourselves to make changes...not to leave the mystery of God out...and not to disregard our Christian tradition, either, but to reclaim this life-giving and inclusive faith around which Jesus demonstrated.

Others are also embarking on these explorations. I just saw an announcement for a conference called "Open Faith"...and this is how it is described: Open Faith is a National Conference bringing together those from various streams of faith to explore what it means to live and believe in just and generous Christian ways.

I am excited because I think we are beginning to hear God speaking in ways that can truly bring both peace and challenge to this changing world... through a living faith! Changes in perception may be necessary.

Richard Rohr, a current Franciscan teacher says: God is not what most people think. . . .Visions of an angry, distant moral scorekeeper or a supernatural Santa Claus handing out cosmic lottery tickets to those who attend the right church or say the right prayer dominate our culture. For many others, God has become irrelevant or simply unbelievable. It is my belief that changing our perception of God has the potential to change everything.

I hear this voice for change from Jane Ferguson, a UCC minister in Colorado who wrote a reflection on Timothy in terms of what we pass on to the future. She suggests that the language that was used in past centuries may not work for our young people in these days nor for those who have been disillusioned with churches. She says that people of today have "no patience for platitudes and warmed-over theological sentiments. They want to know if there is substance behind the ancient language of the church."

She suggests that what might speak to those on the fringes of church by reframing terms such as redemption with words like "restoring wholeness with one another, and with creation"...What young people of today might relate to is to imagine faith as *Oneness through ecological connections.*

Ferguson asks us to "revitalize the language of our faith for 21st century ears." She says that people want to hear the stories of experiences of those animating forces behind creation. She says the idea of "wholeness" means more to today's young people than "salvation."

As some of you notice, I reframe theological language ...because I will never preach anything that I do not believe...this is not to say that my notions won't change and evolve...this is the exciting part about a "living faith!" When I worked at a church in Michigan as CE director, the minister once told the secretary about an upcoming sermon and that he could use one he wrote 5 years ago....I was standing nearby and said, "Only if you still believe it!"

I am also excited about this musician, Bryan Sirchio, I told who about who is coming here. It has been his dream to create an on-line tool for Christian musicians who express this kind of "living faith", to be able to get their music out there and for people to access it. It is called the Convergence Music Program. They want to reclaim

Christianity in ways that will be meaningful to a future generation...offering inspiration that is life-giving...from the example of Jesus!

I think people of the future will rejoice in finding a place where people can call themselves Christian but it is not exclusive; it is open, it is respectful of even the ways God moves through other religions, it is the kind of faith that can open doors in kindness, compassion and new spiritual revelations through prayer and contemplative practices, it is a faith that knows that Jesus was a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew through whom God continues to speak for peace and justice for EVERYONE.

As we are about to move into the future...ten years down the road. How will our living faith carry us there? How might we carry God with us there? And most important of all perhaps, what will God ask of us...here at Charlemont Federated Church?