

Sermon 5.7.17

2 Timothy 1: 3-10

Westminster Presbyterian Church,
Columbia, SC

Strong Women Got Me Here

First and foremost- I want to thank yall for being here today. Specifically, the Presbyterian Women, the Session and Doctor Denny for inviting me to preach. I truly appreciate this church home and all the things you have done for me in my life. Especially the support y'all gave to my trip to Israel last month. Now, to begin my message, I would like for you all to take a moment and turn to those around you, genuinely take time to thank them for being here and welcome them to church today.

The theme for Women's Sunday is "Giving thanks with a grateful heart" and I know I don't spend enough time thanking people for spending their time with me. As I was preparing for this sermon, I realized I haven't thanked the people I should have for their part in my life. I think it is important for us to recognize those around us as part of our path.

When reading 2 Timothy 1: 3-10, it struck me that in this passage, Paul names Timothy's grandmother and mother. I was curious about it, though I know they were Jewish and that the lineage goes through the mother. But then I thought, my mom and my grandmothers were some of the most influential people in developing my faith and my self in general. That is not to say my dad and grandfather weren't influential, but it was much more showing me that women could be the strong one in the family. Those women, my mother, grandmothers and aunts raised me. They are the reason I am able to be where I am.

And let me tell you a Not-So-Secret... This Church raised me too. You all are the reason I am where I am, and I don't mean standing here today. You may look around every other Sunday and realize my generation isn't here. Sure, some of us moved and changed membership, but the rest of us? We are out living the Plan you taught us to look for. We are out following God as our home taught us to. That is from yall. And I have seen it continue as I am out and about in the world.

As a part of my current Internship I am paired with a church in Kansas City. So, at this church, called Second Presbyterian, I am the Family Ministries Intern. It has been really exciting to get to work with the kids of that church the same way y'all worked with me. There is a boy in the 2nd and 3rd grade class, and he is fairly hyperactive. And by that I mean "can't sit during a Sunday School class". He has some of those fidget toys and stuff to help him stay focused, but let me tell you, his teachers have problems sometimes. I love those Sundays, that he has to come down with me and my supervisor so we can "handle him" while his parents are in class. Those Sundays are some of my favorite. Because we get to show that boy how incredibly loved he is. That he isn't a "problem" and that we love hanging around him. And honestly, I've learned more about Pokemon since September than I ever thought I would know. He loves talking about them. So that is what we talk about. So that he knows he is the most special person in our lives at that moment. That he matters in the Body of Christ and that we love him.

I have one girl, the pastor's daughter, she is in the middle school youth group. And I help with the middle schoolers when they need an extra chaperone for things. The lock-in was one of those events, so I got to stay up with the Middle and High schoolers one night. So obviously, you get to talking. And that is all Middle school girls want apparently. To talk to the cool older

woman at these events. So that's what I do. She came up to me and said "I am an atheist." and it hit me hard. I was shocked. Cause we are literally sitting at a youth group event, and her dad is the Pastor! So I ask her why and we get into this huge talk of why she doubts and at one point, she looks at me and says, "do you think that is ok? Am I allowed to question all this?" and I wanted to cry. I am sure at some point her and her father had these same conversations, but a lot of the time growing up, I needed someone other than my parents to tell me something for me to really hear it. So I looked her square in the eye and told her about all the times I doubted the stories I was learning. And I watched as she started to realize she was allowed to feel that way and that she was still loved and valued. I honestly believe she needed to know that that was allowed and that people in the church currently doubted. I don't think it would have helped for me to argue with her about being an atheist. But instead I started the foundation of a relationship that she knows she can trust and that I am going to continue to love her for her and whatever part she plays in the bigger Plan. I firmly believe she will come back to it someday and realize that she has always been loved by God and that Jesus is our Savior. She just needs a minute to walk on her own path before God tells her in a sassy way that God has been right all along.

God calls us to be grateful. To be genuinely thankful for the things God so willingly gives us. Strong women and strong people to look up to, a hint into the Plan for our lives. We don't deserve those things, yet God gives them.

My dad always says if you hear the same thing multiple things in a week, it may just be God telling you something. I firmly believe this. One of the last times I talked to my grandmother, Oma, we were talking about my future. I was looking into Graduation and already knew I was going to be going to Florida and Missouri for different camps. She knew I was going

to apply for Seminary and that I hoped to go to Columbia Theological in Georgia. She told me she was proud of me. That she thought I would do such a great job and that she couldn't wait to see where I'd end up. Between her, my Nana, my aunts and Mom talking to me, I knew this wasn't just going to be a whim. It seemed to me that God was placing these people in the conversations I needed to hear. The last time I talked to my grandfather, Papa, I got to tell him the wonderful news, that I had gotten into Seminary. That I was definitely going, and to tell Oma when he saw her, cause I knew she would want to know. My grandparents, all 3 of them, were so incredibly helpful in guiding me to this path. They always supported me and told me they were proud of me.

My parents followed suit of course and have encouraged me every step of the way, especially when I am in Missouri for my internship. I image that is what Timothy was thinking of while reading this letter from Paul. He was thinking back on the faith and lessons taught to him by his family. How he knew they were proud of him and his testimony, and how Paul was proud of Timothy's testimony.

About 2 years ago, I was driving to my apartment from working at camp for the weekend. And I was dreading going back to class. Suddenly, I very clearly heard God telling me, "Duh... cause you're supposed to be in Ministry." To be fair- when God speaks to me, it tends to be a very sassy voice. I believe it's from me being a little stubborn and tending to follow my own path. In that moment, I realized God had called me to camp ministry long ago, and that I had very happily ignored it. And you know what happened when I told my mom? She said "well of course you're doing camp ministry... I knew that 5 years ago." If you know my mom, Amelia, she tends to be right, but gives us just enough time to figure it out ourselves.

Let me tell you a little about camp. I grew up going to Bethelwoods in York, South Carolina and fell in love with it after about an hour of being there the first time when I was 10. You may recognize the camp's name, because some of the kids from this church still go every year. I've always felt at home at camp, it was a place that I really started to grow in my personal faith. Every year, until I graduated College, I was at Bethelwoods working in different roles but every summer, I was growing closer and closer to God and to the understanding of this Plan God had for me. When God told me that of course I was supposed to do Camp Ministry, it was the easiest thing I could have imagined. The hardest part was convincing my art professors this was a real job, a real goal to have and that I was excited about it. But the part that wasn't hard was telling my parents and mentors. They all seemed surprised that it had taken me that long to figure it out. But I believe God gives us just enough room to grow and figure out the Plan in our time. Though sometimes, when we need it, God will stop us dead in our tracks to tell us.

After college, I went to Tampa because for some reason God needed me to spend an entire summer in Florida, baking. God showed me that summer that love, grace, and God need to be at the center of camp for it to work. The directors I had down there are some of the most loving and graceful men I have ever worked for. And God was subtly introducing me to my mentors and people I could fall back on when I needed someone. So in November when I was realizing I had just moved to Missouri and really quite frankly wanted to be back home and what was I doing, God set me in a conversation with my boss from Tampa, who said in a fairly sassy tone, that I knew this would be hard when I started this whole process. And it wouldn't be worth it if it was easy. And that he loved me, get over it and that he knew I could do this. He also reminded me that I had a family in Florida if I ever needed one. Luckily I haven't had to use that

offer but knowing I have it is incredibly moving. I hope someday to be able to tell my staff the same things. God is using these months to teach me how to find those mentors and how to be one myself.

I am incredibly thankful for all the things God has given me and told me over the last couple years. God is preparing me for the call I have received in a way that is overwhelmingly thorough. We need to be thankful for these things that God is giving us, because they are not required. We could easily be robots that do God's Will and it would probably be a easier life. But that isn't what we are called to do. So, find those strong people that have been placed around you for a reason and listen to the Plan God is handing you.

So please, take a moment to think of the people who got you to where you are. Either your mentors, your family or those friends who push you the extra mile, make sure you take some time either today or this week to thank those people. No matter how small their part may have seemed in your life, they all got you to where you are.

Thank you so much for being here today and for the role you've played in my life.