

“A Pray-er, a Lover, and a Fighter”
Pentecost 19, I Timothy 6:6-19
September 25, 2016, CUCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
Rev. Rebecca Kemper Poos

I. RUNNING HARD TO BE YOURSELF

1 Timothy 6:6-19 The Message (MSG)

6-8 A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the *rich simplicity of being yourself before God*. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that's enough.

9-10 But if it's only money these leaders are after, they'll self-destruct in no time. Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after.

Running Hard

11-12 But you, Timothy, man of God: Run for your life from all this. Pursue a righteous life—a life of wonder, faith, love, steadiness, courtesy. Run hard

and fast in the faith. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to, the life you so fervently embraced in the presence of so many witnesses.

II. FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Fight the good fight for the faith.
Fight the good fight of the faith.
Fight the good fight of faith.

Each phrasing, each preposition conjures up slightly different images. What comes to mind when you hear those words, “Fight the Good Fight of Faith?”

The choir anthem charged us:
“Fight the good fight with all thy might!
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Thy joy and crown eternally.”

Give it all you got! Christ will strengthen you to take life by the horns and live with passion. Joy will be your reward!

It might elicit images of armor. Of stalwart Christian Soldiers, marching as to war.

But “fight” here might not quite be the right word. At least not broad enough. Picture the Olympics more

than a war scene. The Greek here is a powerful phrase for sure, but it's a powerful urge, a goal, not a thirst for blood:

It means: to struggle, literally (to compete for a prize), (to contend with an adversary), (to endeavor to accomplish something) -- fight, labor fervently, strive.

III. GOOD FIGHT OF THE FAITH

Hmmm....

What is it to “fight the good fight of the faith?” What does that look like at 10:00 on a Monday morning for a person living in the Way of Jesus, seeking to follow Christ, striving to be a person of faith?

“But you, Timothy, person of God.” “But you, Rebecca, person of God.” But you, Bill. But you, Bowie. But you, Millie, Bob, Ron, Marge, people of God.....fight the good fight. Run hard and fast in the faith....so that.....

Buechner, "'Fight the good fight,' he says (1 Timothy 6:12), where it's not the fight to overcome the best of the competition that he's talking about but the fight to overcome the worst in ourselves."

What is the worst in ourselves that needs to be fought to overcome? Is it striving after the wrong things? The love of those things that leave us empty? The pursuits that leave us feeling poor when actually, we are rich

beyond belief? In, “the *rich simplicity of being yourself before God.*”

If the Dalai Lama were talking to Timothy, as he is launching into his call to life and ministry, he might have said it this way:

“The planet does not need more ‘successful people’. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds. It needs people to live **well in their places**. It needs people with moral courage willing to join the struggle to make the world habitable and humane and these qualities have little to do with success as our culture is the set.” – Dalai Lama

Simply put, it means, to be, (all wrapped into one), a Pray-er, a lover and a fighter.

IV. ATHLETICS

“Fight the good fight of faith. More accurately: “Contest the contest.” Yep, it’s really an athletic metaphor, not a call to war. “Run hard and fast, person of God, and *seize* that life of Faith that is yours for the taking ahold of!”

Just in time for a Sunday Broncos game! An *early* Sunday Broncos game! And yes, you *will* get out of here on time for the early part of the game! Maybe not the pre-commercials or the actual kickoff. But early. Cuz God forbid our faith and worship life should interfere with our OTHER religious life!

Rev. Jane Anne Ferguson tells of seeing this passage come to life before her eyes, in the witnessing of a 7th Degree testing of a black belt Tae Kwon Do master. The master had studied 35 years to get to this point—truly his study was his way of life.

“The master spoke of seven qualities necessary for the achievement of black belt excellence – “vision, belief in action, integrity, persistence, expansion, compassion, acceptance and surrender.”¹ These qualities are the “right ways” he is called to follow in his life as an athlete, a martial arts master and a teacher. However it was clear that his athletic life is not separate from the rest of his life. These seven qualities encompass and fund the “confession” of this man’s entire life.”

These are the same qualities that a God-fueled person, fighting the good fight, needs. Body, mind, spirit wholeheartedly engaged, interdependent. Committed and driven in purpose. Fully engaged in following the ways of God.

V. FIGHT OUR DESIRE TO JUDGE

To fight the good fight of faith, is to live out our faith wholeheartedly, in all of life. No separation of our religious life and our everyday life. No Sunday-morning-only Christianity.

That might even affect how we act toward other Christians. One of the things we must fight in

ourselves when we fight for the faith, is the tendency to judge. Here we need all three of our best selves—our pray-er, our lover, our fighter selves.

Kaji Douša

A lot of us spend quite a bit of time decrying our kindred in Christ – particularly the kind who cast ballots for the other side, who suffer from what we deem incorrect biblical interpretations. We give a side-eye to conversion stories that are too convenient. We contrast our own (right!) Christian perspective with their (wrong!) one.

We should hold each other accountable to our understanding of what God calls us to do, particularly from a justice perspective. But as we do, let us never presume to understand or even to know things that hide in the shadows of the lives of others. We do not know the supplications they bring to God. We cannot presume them to be out of communication with their Maker.

May we never forget that those "other kinds" of Christians are still attempting a following of Christ. Maybe they have stumbled. Maybe we have, too, not with false equivalencies, but in forgetting the call to a humility that says there is a story we do not know there. When we show an openness to holding a loving light to the full truth of a person, sometimes we uncover a snapshot of the beauty God sees in each child of God.

VI. FIGHT FOR EYES WIDE OPEN

Fighting the good fight of faith is seeking with eyes wide open. With eyes and ears and hearts and minds open and ready to learn, explore, find out what makes others tick. With a humility that says “there is a story we do not know there.”

It is seeking to understand, to walk a mile in another’s moccasins, as the native saying goes. This comes into play in *every* situation. Every encounter, every relationship, every controversial issue, every human interaction and decision.

It means to seek first to learn about the other and where they’re coming from. Among other things, this means to seek to understand other faiths—not just our own “good fight of the faith”, but of all faiths. And not just Islam and Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism or even Atheism and agnosticism, but other expressions and embodiments of our own Christian faith.

In our **worship**, we are endeavoring to do just that. We’re bringing a broader scope of songs, prayers,

expressions of faith from within the gathered community. Some of these offerings will be new to you—they come from someone else’s experience and faith journey. These are deeply meaningful songs and prayers and beliefs about how faith meets life.

When someone brings an offering to our worship and community life, and it’s new to you, or expressed differently than you might have considered, ASK your neighbor about *their* experience of God. Find out (not challenging, but honestly seeking to learn) what *they* find meaningful, uplifting. When a song or a belief or a prayer comes forth from someone of a different path than yours, delve-in with open eyes, ears and heart to see the gift there.

Explore how this person’s beliefs and faith life are fed or affirmed by this. Don’t try to convert them to experiencing God the way YOU experience God, but see what you can learn that’s new to you.

First, seek to UNDERSTAND. Listen. Ponder.

Besides this earth-shaking change to 10:00 worship and a new style, we have several other areas in our community where we have a golden opportunity to stop, listen, learn, seek to understand, before forming our opinions or deciding how to vote or promote.

We have the School bond issue, Vertex Concert Festival, the political races. Road construction, growth, change happening all around. With everything we are dealing with, don’t decide which

camp you're in and then avoid or alienate those on "the other side." But, seek first to understand. Learn as much as you possibly can about the careful thought that's gone into every issue. Look for the new perspective through the eyes, ears and moccasins of each other.

Let's be Pray-ers, Lovers, and Fighters – in the best, Christ-like way we can muster. EVEN if they're a Cincinnati Bengals fan! Even then. **Amen.**