

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-14
FAITHFUL TO JESUS

Loyalty is a precious commodity. It is so hard won, and so easily lost! Loyalty is about sticking with someone or something through thick and thin; I was asked other day if I had a Nectar Card because the place where I was spending money offered me points, to reward my loyalty to them by giving them my business; Tesco clubcard does the same thing. There are all kinds of things that test that loyalty and sometimes it gives way, other times it stands firm despite being tested almost to the limit. That is for us to decide! Is our loyalty to Jesus rewarded by clubcard points? I don't think so, but it is such an important quality and is equally tested in so many ways. In Cambodia, at the pastors' conf, I was asked by one of the pastors "Have you ever been beaten for your faith?" So I returned question to the group and asked anyone who had been beaten for their Christian faith to raise their hand; about 10-12 hands went up; I had to admit that I hadn't. But our loyalty to Jesus is tested in other ways by the society in which we live, by the world and its pressures, by sin living in us.

Timothy's loyalty to Jesus was being tested; we're not really sure by what, but we know from the way in which Paul writes to him in 2 Timothy 1, that his loyalty is being tested; perhaps by his timid nature, perhaps by the fact that his friend and mentor was now in prison for his faith; perhaps Paul's imprisonment had made Timothy even more fearful and timid than he had already been. For whatever reason, Paul encourages Timothy to be loyal to Jesus, to stick with Christian faith and Church and not to give up. This is not an academic exercise: for all of us loyalty to Jesus is an important quality, whether we know it or not. For some of us, it is stronger than others; some of us have let this quality drift more than others have; all of us have professed Christian faith in some form or another and so have professed some kind of loyalty to Jesus; perhaps it is time to re-examine that loyalty! Paul reminds Timothy of two things that have brought him this far.

1. People around him. "*I have...*" (v5f) Timothy's faith has been helped and shaped by other people and their influence on him. He is the third generation of Christians in his family. His grandmother, a woman called Lois; his mother Eunice were both Christians before Timothy and their faith surely shaped Timothy's life and his faith. Then Paul came to Lystra where Timothy lived and Paul began preaching the gospel and Timothy's faith became stronger and Paul recognized, in Timothy, gifts for ministry and leadership in the Church and began to mentor him and so Paul's faith and ministry shaped Timothy in other ways. So these other people were an extremely important part of Timothy's life and faith and as a result of their influence and faith Paul says "*For this reason...*" (v6) Timothy's loyalty to Jesus is to be strengthened by remembering other people who have influenced and shaped him; something that was in danger of dying is to be fanned into life again.

Christian faith is not a thing to do on your own. Well, we can try to do it on our own, but faith is much harder to do on your own and dies more easily when we lose contact with other Christians. Church is about Christians living, growing together, encouraging one another in faith. Who was it that first introduced you to Jesus? We asked that question of a group a while back and the answers might surprise you: grannies, mothers, fathers, Sunday School teachers, school teachers and a few said 'my minister'. Other people play a significant part in our endurance as Christians and we don't realise just how significant that is at times. We try to manage on our own and be independent; at the hardest times of our lives, lots of people retreat away and stop coming to Church just when they need support most; in fact, faith is so much stronger and better when we are encouraged by other people and their faith is

stronger by our encouragement. Loyalty to Jesus stronger when there are other people around us.

2. Remember Jesus *"I am not..." (v12)* Paul is in prison for his faith; is Timothy becoming ashamed of the gospel and does he hide his faith for fear of the same thing happening to him? Paul says *"do not be..." (v8)* Be proud of the gospel because of what Jesus is able to do. Paul has entrusted his life to Jesus; Paul has entrusted his future to Jesus, his hope, his salvation to Jesus and even now, even in prison for his faith, even when his loyalty to Jesus is being tested to the utmost, he knows, he is convinced, he is sure that Jesus won't let him down. Jesus is able to guard what Paul has entrusted to Him; Jesus is able to save him completely and nothing has taken away the power and grace of Jesus. Jesus' loyalty to God and to us was tested to the utmost, and He was willing even to die for love of world, to put His life on the line so that we can be saved and be blessed with every blessing that God has to give. Jesus' loyalty should inspire loyalty in us.

It is so easy to forget what Jesus did. Maybe we've never really thought about it before in these terms; maybe we've heard the stories so often that we begin to take them for granted. However we are, it does us an immense amount of good to be reminded from time to time of what it cost Jesus to be our Saviour and to be reminded of what Jesus is able to do for us. For us, He laid down His life; He is able to save us completely because of His death and resurrection. There is no need for us to look elsewhere for a Saviour because we have a totally reliable Saviour in Jesus; there is no need for us to feel let down or neglected because Jesus is at work in us by His Spirit all of time.

The communion service brings both of these themes into focus. The bread and wine are given to the Church to nurture our faith in Jesus, to strengthen our loyalty and faithfulness to Jesus. These two themes are part and parcel of what we do here today. First of all, we do this together: The Reformation 450 years ago rediscovered the communion service as a family meal, a time for the Church family to sit together round the Lord's Table as if eating a meal together; so we pass the bread and wine round the Church, from person to person, serving one another, as a family. This is symbolic of the relationships that we have with one another, encouraging one another, reminding ourselves that we are not in this on our own, but are committed together to worship and serve and witness to Jesus in our communities. Secondly, the focus of communion is firmly on Jesus and on what He has done for us. Bread and wine are shared to remember Jesus' body and blood, symbolic signs that remind us of One who gave Himself for us, who loved us and gave Himself to be our Saviour. They also remind us of One who was raised from the dead and is still the Saviour of the world, is still able to save us and forgive; who still loves and blesses us. "He is able..." He is the centre of the circle; He is the One whom we love and worship and serve and to whom we are to be loyal and faithful.

Remain loyal to Jesus all the days of your life; express that loyalty by the love of your heart to Jesus and by being here week by week in worship; tell others about him, your children, grandchildren, friends, neighbours – tell them that Jesus loves them! Strengthen, and be strengthened by, one another; remember Jesus.