Hannover International Worship
September 20, 2026

Sermon 2 Tim 1:7-10
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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A few weeks ago, I had some free time and decided to tidy up my desk. Amidst a pile of papers, I found a sermon my father had written. I was just about to file it away when I decided to read it instead. What I read moved me deeply. In it, he spoke about his faith and how it had shaped him throughout his youth and into his later years. They were little stories that made it clear just how much confidence and hope he had drawn from his faith.

After reading it, I sat quietly in my desk chair for a few more minutes. The stories weren't new to me. I had heard them many times from my father. But it's different when you have them right in front of you in black and white—printed like a will.

Our sermon text for today is an excerpt from such a will. It is a kind of farewell address. It was written by a mature and experienced man who is expressing his spiritual legacy for the next generation. It is not Paul, but an unknown author from around 90–100 A.D. He lived his entire life in the Christian faith. Even in the face of state persecution, he stood by his faith. Now he passes on his experiences of this Spirit to those who will come after him. Among those who are directly adressed are we here today in Petri Church. What does he have to say to us?

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.
So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

Timothy is a good psychologist. He knows full well that fear can spread very quickly. We experience this in so many situations in life—whether it's exams in school or college, relationships, or illness. Then our feelings and thoughts are often dominated by this fear. It's hard to break free from this fear. This also applies to our faith. In Germany, we may not be persecuted, but we're often cautious about professing our faith publicly. There's too great a risk that we'll be ridiculed or mocked. We then say that faith is a private matter and use that as a shield.

Timothy counters this spirit of fear with a completely different spirit: the Spirit of God. Three key terms hint at what this is: power, love, and self-discipline. These are grand words that are difficult to translate into our everyday language. I'd like to give it a try:

1. First, I'd like to point out the tense in which our author writes: "God has given us a Spirit." In the original Greek text, the verb here is in the perfect tense. Grammatically, this means that an event began in the past. However, that beginning continues to have an impact to this day. Our author uses this tense very deliberately. He is saying: God is at the beginning of our faith. Right from the beginning of our lives, we are gifted with abilities and talents. Within us lie strengths that we are meant to discover over the course of our lives. God has laid a foundation within us upon which we can build well. Our task is to

explore with curiosity and to allow what God has placed within us to unfold. As the director of the Hildesheim Mission for the Blind, this thought has become a great source of comfort to me.

Four years ago, we launched a new project on the island of Nias, in western Sumatra, Indonesia. The goal is to give blind and visually impaired children and young people the opportunity to receive educational or vocational support. Firwan is one of these children. He came to the Oni Pedistra Training Center with his three siblings, two of whom are also visually impaired. What Firwan had experienced in his life up to that point was this: Everyone saw him only as the blind boy. The neighbors advised him never to walk anywhere. The best way to get around, they said, would be to slide on his bottom. Attending school wasn't even a consideration. How could a blind boy possibly learn? Firwan has been attending the Oni Pedistra Training Center for two years now. Now he reads, jumps, and runs around just like any other boy his age. And then came the music.
Last year, I brought two donated instruments from the Petri-Nikodemus congregation: two violins. He's been taking lessons for a good half a year now. The first videos I saw show that Firwan has talent—he has a natural gift for music.

So why is the idea that God plants the seed within us such a comforting thought for me? The children and young people we work with are not defined primarily by their blindness; rather, they are children and young people with many gifts and abilities. Our task—and that of all those in positions of responsibility—is to awaken and nurture these gifts. But nothing more than that. The foundation has already been laid. So we,

too, can draw courage and self-asteame from the unknown author of the letters to Timothy: God has given us His Spirit! Rejoice in this, even in difficult times.

2. This Spirit of God has four aspects—one negative and three positive:

First of all the negative one, **fear**: I do not wish to view fear not only negatively: it certainly serves a good biological purpose. it allerts us of dangerous situations. it increases our readiness for needed action. But fear also leads to panic and deep anxiety. This panic does not come from God, says Timothy. He himself would have every reason to fear. After all, he is writing from prison, and his outlook is far from dright. But he says: Your faith gives you confidence. Do not give in to panic.

He then highlights three very positive ways the Spirit impacts our lives: First, **power**: The Greek word for power, “dynamis,” means more than just strength. It stands for movement and vitality. A person moved by the Spirit of God has imagination and ideas. They combine their creativity with the ability to put it into action.

This is how God's Spirit works: he helps us find new, surprising possibilities in a world full of fear, violence, and environmental crises. He helps break down structures of power and open up new ways to act. We can see this surprising power again and again in Jesus' parables. In one parable, a father acts toward his son surprisingly: the son, who had wasted his whole inheritance is welcomed home with gratitude and joy. There is even a celebration.

In East Frisia, where I served as a pastor for many years, I experienced things differently: disputes over money there have driven parents and children apart for life.

Another parable tells of a Samaritan who helps a Jewish man who has been beaten and robbed, without asking about his national identity. He lets his heart speak and helps. How differently we experience the world right now! National identities have become so important that the lives of other people and national borders no longer matter.

The second positive aspect is **love**: Among my father's memories were formative events from the Nazi era. As a schoolboy, he watched a group of teenage kids march by, bellowing an anti-Semitic song.
One line went:
"When the stormtrooper marches into battle, yes, then he's full of cheerful courage. / And when Jewish blood spatters from the knife, yes, then it's twice as good." The kids felt dynamic and courageous.

The dynamic of the Spirit of God has a clear direction. It always points toward love. Courage, imagination, and creative ideas can also be merciless. It wasn't just the Nazis who mastered that. God's Spirit wants to protect us from that. It can only be done with love.

The last positive aspect is **self-discipline**: The word "self discipline doesn't sound as nice as power and love. Discipline or prudence—that sounds like self-denial and loss of pleasure. But it is a necessary boundary. We must ask ourselves again and again what we are doing. Enjoying ourselves is nice, but it is not in itself a religious virtue.

We must consider: Does what I like to do truly serve God's cause? Are my actions responsible before God? Our author believes that assessing this is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

3. Based on these reflections, however, he expresses a new thought: "Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." The crucial thing that Jesus brought, our author says, is this: Jesus took away the power of death.

When my father was diagnosed with cancer, the topic of death suddenly became a reality in my family. Medical treatments postponed the confrontation with the subject for a while. But when it became clear that nothing could help anymore, my father himself—and we as well—spoke intensely about what we hope for and what we believe in. At the end of his life, he lay on his deathbed and said, "I am not afraid of dying or of death. I'm looking forward to what's to come."

I don't know about you, but the older I get, the more I realize that everything ultimately comes down to how we deal with death. That death is the measure of all things — that's what Timothy believes.
We heard the story of the resurrection of Lazarus as the Gospel reading. Lazarus is dead. Then Jesus comes and takes him out of his tomb. This is not meant merely symbolically. It's not about rescuing a lonely person from the tomb of his loneliness and bringing him back into the community. It's not, psychologically speaking, about leading a depressed person out of a gloomy state of mind. No, it's truly about resurrection.

I have stood not only at my father's deathbed, but also at many others as a pastor. Each time, I thought to myself: In the face of death, our faith must be put to the test. Or to put it another way: In this extreme situation, we are allowed to experience the power of faith. Timothy writes: Do not fear death. Look to Jesus' resurrection and hold on to it. I know that some of you have accompanied—and continue to accompany—the sick and the dying on their journey to death.

The process of taking care of a dying person is a path filled with tears and pain. At the same time, however, it can also be a path to deep closeness and understanding. Here, too, we can experience the strength that our faith can give us. I have seen how difficult it is for the one who must leave, and how difficult it is for the one left behind.
But just as the witnesses of Lazarus's resurrection burst into amazement and joy, so too may we be certain that in the end we will burst into gratitude and jubilation.
For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and-self-discipline.
Faith will sustain us.
Amen.