

October 20, 2024, RISE UP! – and Retain the Spirit’s good and beautiful things 2 Tim 1:14

"Witnesses to grace, guard good things, and bring life to light."

Today, we come together to celebrate the priesthood of all believers and honor the laity's invaluable contributions to our ministry. Laity Sunday is a special occasion that underscores the importance of every Christian's role in loving God and neighbor. As we, God's people, continue to grow in grace and strive to become 'all-love' disciples in our community, we are reminded of our collective mission to connect all to God's saving love in Jesus Christ. **Today, we reaffirm God's call to all who follow the way of Jesus, to lead others to him, and to cherish and protect what has been entrusted to us: our witness to grace at work in every life.**

Laity Sunday is a day dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the priesthood and ministry of all believers. It is a time for everyone to come together in God's community to promote healing and love that can repair the world. Laity Sunday emphasizes the Christian belief that all individuals are called to take part in God's mission to bring life and spread the good news of Jesus. This year, the focus is on cherishing the good and beautiful things that God's Spirit has entrusted to us, including our personal experiences of grace at work in every life.

This year's message is a call to action for the laity: The theme: 'Rise Up! And retain the Spirit's good and beautiful things, to the vision of living 'together by grace,' is a powerful reminder of our collective responsibility to spread the message of Jesus and actively participate in God's mission. **The goal is to encourage all members of the church to go beyond its walls and become active witnesses to grace in action.** This involves being present, observing, and rallying others to care. Paul also urges Timothy to guard and preserve the beautiful lives touched by grace and bear witness to the ongoing restoration work happening around us.

As witnesses living together by grace, we bring life to light by following Christ Jesus, who defeated death and illuminated the living (2 Timothy 1:10). We are called to be a community that cares for the lives of those brought near to God through Jesus—lives entrusted to God and also entrusted by God to us. The good and beautiful things brought by the Spirit are lives changed by Jesus' love. **This year, let's reflect on a few questions:**

1. Think about an experience of grace that you have never quite understood but have trusted by faith. Is it easy for you to say with the hymn writer, D. W. Whittle, "I know not why God's wondrous grace...But I know whom..." (see Hymn 714, I Know Whom I Have Believed)?
2. In Second Timothy chapter one, Paul reminds us that Jesus brings life to light, and we entrust our lives to God and one another. Who in your community brings life to light – showing both needs and the good things being done to bring life to people on the 'underside' of life?
3. What has someone entrusted to you (something for safekeeping, a story secret they could trust you to keep in confidence, etc.)?

4. Are there things (good and beautiful, made out of the 'dust' and wreckage) that we can only know with the Spirit's help in us? What things? What restoration project or reclaimed thing in your own life has become a testimony to the God who makes "beautiful things out of the dust"?

In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul encourages young Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him with help from the Spirit at work in the life of the community. Paul urges Timothy to rekindle the same kind of life together in Jesus, which started with Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). This reflects Paul's own story of saving grace, where he has entrusted his redeemed life to God for safekeeping, as well as the lives of others entrusted to him. Paul sees his work as a witness to grace at work, bringing reclaimed life to light (2 Timothy 1:10). This is what Jesus does and what we also do when we see God bringing good and beautiful things to life.

We are moving towards a future where we recognize the value in each other. The Holy Spirit is guiding us to live from our innermost selves. We can achieve this by asking, "How can I/we support my/our fellow human beings?" How can I/we respect the diverse perspectives that enhance our spiritual journey together? We release our feelings of guilt and judgment by being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19). As laity and clergy, we are called to build connections! We accomplish this by staying rooted in our faith and sharing the love of Christ in every community we engage with.

We are meant to be 'story stewards' who attend to the traumas, trials, and beautiful restorations in the lives of those who trust us to care. In this sense, we might consider our local communities and the people who struggle there as our 'laity address' (the place and call for help and accompanying grace from the people). What is your community's 'laity address'? Who lives there? What has happened to them? What can they teach you about grace at work in every life?

The beautiful things God is making out of the dust are us and those in our zones of influence. **We must guard and treasure these things: the faces, places, and stories of lives repaired, repurposed, and rebuilt through the Spirit at work in us all.**

The Spirit's good and beautiful things are lives changed by Jesus' love. Are we going to be trustworthy caretakers of every life and at every address we 'near'? That's the calling that Paul encourages Timothy to embrace as only one of many witnesses who see grace at work for life and gather others to do the same. Our church will thrive if it takes care to keep this trust and love every life beyond our Sunday service walls.