

First Presbyterian Church
2 Timothy 2:11-13, “Celebrating God’s Faithfulness”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 10/19/2025

When Abraham Lincoln became president,
he owned a dog.
According to Reader’s Digest,
“having dogs in the White House was not the fairly common,
beloved practice it is today. Abe’s wife, Mary Todd,
talked him out of bringing Fido to the White House
because Fido was a rather rowdy pup
and she wasn’t sure how he’d adjust to a different,
potentially chaotic life in D.C.”
(<https://www.rd.com/article/fido-default-dog-name/>)

Lincoln’s dog never lived in the White House,
but he was photographed by F.W. Ingmire in a 1861 portrait,
and became quite famous as the President’s pup.



The dog’s name was: “Fido.”

Since that time, “Fido” has been immediately recognizable as a dog name.
The name is an adaptation of the Latin word *fidus*, which means
faithful.

Dogs are renowned for their faithfulness.
Even if you get fired from your job, left by your lover,
and kicked out of your apartment,
your dog will sleep by your side
and look at you with admiration and loyalty.

You trust that your dog will be faithful to you.

This is a serious question: Can you trust that *God* will be faithful?

Yellowstone National Park sits atop one of the most unstable and widespread volcanic formations in the world.

Geologists have documented over 10,000 hydrothermal springs and pools, including 500 geysers.

But the most famous of all these wonders is Old Faithful. →SLIDE

I remember going to Yellowstone with my parents when my Uncle Glen and Aunt Jean lived in the park and ran the gift shop at the main Yellowstone lodge.

They took us out to Old Faithful, and there was a predicted time for the next eruption: 1:37pm.

Ugh, it was only 12:45. So we waited and waited ... probably not so long a wait for my parents, but as a kid it was agonizing.

I have to admit, after more than 30 minutes' wait, I was skeptical that I would actually see this thing go off. 1:36 ... 1:37 ... 1:38 ... 1:39 ... 1:40 ... (I was getting worried) but then *it happened*.

The gurgling steam became more pronounced, and in moments, boiling hot water began shooting up 100 feet into the air.

Over the last 30 years, the average interval between eruptions has only varied by about 30 minutes time.

If you go there, it will erupt. You can count on Old Faithful.

Can you count on God to act with such regularity?

Do you really depend on God to be faithful?

I wish I could give you an easy answer,
but I can't, because the reality is complicated.

God is not a domesticated pet who depends on you for survival.
God is not a feature of geology which produces a phenomenon
in predictable cycles.
Therefore, God's faithfulness is not like these other kinds of faithfulness.

If we these other sorts of faithfulness are mixed into our minds
when we sing to God, "Great is thy faithfulness,"
or when we have a stewardship campaign called
"Celebrating God's Faithfulness,"
we may end up feeling confused.
We may even end up feeling duped.

As a pastor, that's pretty concerning.
The Apostle Paul was worried about precisely this sort of reaction
from his young apprentice named Timothy.

Paul wrote to Timothy at a time when the future of the church
was by no means clear.
This was a community teetering on the edge of survival,
and Paul himself was in prison.
He was imprisoned by Rome due to accusations of disrupting the peace
with his preaching and teaching in Ephesus and Jerusalem.
Paul denied doing anything wrong –
but he would not modify his message about Jesus
to make others happy. Even so, he remained in prison.

What kind of an example does it set for God's faithfulness
when the most central figure in the spread of the church
sits chained in a jail cell?
Can't a God who is faithful be relied upon to bail someone of trouble
who has done nothing wrong?

Paul focuses on this theme numerous times throughout
the first two chapters of his letter to Timothy.

In chapter 1 v. 11-12 he says that he was appointed a herald, an apostle,
and a teacher of the gospel, **“that is why I am suffering as I am.**

Yet this is no cause for shame because

**I know whom I have believed and am convinced that
he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him ...
until that day.”**

Until what day? Until the day that the Kingdom of God is revealed
and everything is set right in the world.

Paul doesn't believe that God's faithfulness means we will avoid suffering.

In fact, he urges Timothy in 2:3, **“Join with me in suffering...”**

Paul was suffering because he would not conform to the powers of his day.

Could we face such hardship today?

It's possible. Like Christians at any time or place,
we might be excluded from some of the
protections that are afforded to those who give their loyalties
to the powers of the day.

We see every week that newspapers, universities, companies, media corporations,
and even cities and states are asked to bend the knee
to government demands.

If you do, you get protection.
If you don't you suffer.

Well, I don't want to suffer. But to whom do I owe my loyalty?

Only to the one who can guard what is entrusted to him until *that day*.
We only owe loyalty to Jesus.

Here are the verses that come immediately prior to our passage today.

“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

This is my gospel, for which I am suffering

even to the point of being chained like a criminal.

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect,

that they too may obtain the salvation

that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”

Remember – don’t forget – that Jesus was fully divine (raised from the dead)

and fully human (descended from David),

and sits in heaven (as a King).

The one who suffered on the cross is now enthroned in heaven forever.

This is where we see the logic of God’s faithfulness

as displayed in the poetic form

of Paul in vv. 11-13.

Paul’s poem has four simple lines with parallel structure.

The first two lines mirror each other

and the second two lines mirror each other.

It begins like this:

If we died with him,

we will also live with him,

[we are joined in *both* the death and resurrection of Jesus]

If we endure

[implicitly, if we suffer]

we will also reign with him.

Genesis 1 says that it is the role of humanity to have

dominion over creation when we live in harmony with God’s purpose.

If this is true for the original creation,

it will also be true in the new creation.

These lines mirror each other with a common message:

God's faithfulness is on display in that those who are
united with Jesus by faith will experience
both the suffering and the glory demonstrated in Jesus' life.
... *That's why* Paul invites Timothy to share in his suffering.

**If we disown him,
he will also disown us.**

This is tough to hear.

But it's not Paul's idea – this was the teaching of Jesus.
Matthew 10:33,
in his sermon to the disciples
sending them out to prepare people for Jesus' teaching,
he says that if they acknowledge him before people,
he will acknowledge them before God,
but, **“whoever disowns me before others,
I will disown before my Father in heaven.”**

Disown. It's the same Greek word in both verses, used the same way.

It means to reject or repudiate a connection.

Is this being faithful?

Well, yes, because it is consistent and reliable.

Our faith in Jesus must *mean something* to us
when put under pressure here on earth.

If we repudiate Jesus, then Jesus will not hold us to a relationship
that we do not to be part of.

Then comes the fourth and final line, in parallel construction to the third line:

**If we are faithless,
*he remains faithful.***

Do you hear the surprise shift? The break in the pattern?

The last line is supposed to be, “he will be faithless with us.”

But no! If we are faithless, Jesus remains faithful.

How can it be? “**for he cannot disown himself.**”

Disown! Back to the same line we encountered in v. 3.

Paul is saying that when we are united by faith with Christ,
there are relational obligations involved that go both directions,
but God’s grace, love, and *faithfulness* are of such quality
that even when we should be abandoned
and left to fend for ourselves,
God remains faithful to us.

We are literally *incorporated* into Jesus’ body,
and he cannot disown his own self.

That’s what God’s faithfulness is like.

Do you want that, or do you want the faithfulness of a dog?
Do you want that, or do you want the faithfulness of a geyser?

Our lives are to be a celebration of God’s faithfulness.

Not just our money, and not just when life goes easy for us,
but our relationships, our commitments, our way of working,
our laughter, artwork, and the things we make together,
and yes, even our suffering
are all oriented toward God who is faithful.

This is whole-life stewardship.

This is giving to God what is God’s, and to Caesar what is Caesar’s.
Our financial stewardship, then, is really just a symbol.

It’s not our money that God is interested in,
and we certainly aren’t buying ourselves any favors.
In fact, we may be committing ourselves to greater suffering!

But when we choose with our whole lives to celebrate God’s faithfulness,
we know that we are held by the one who cannot be bound.

The world may chain us down, the world may chain our neighbors down,
but God’s word? No, God’s word is not chained.
Let us give thanks to God for the good news.