# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Confident Faith”**

**2 Timothy 1:5-8**

 **April 3, 2022**

My favorite cartoon characters are Calvin and Hobbes. Calvin is a six-year old boy and Hobbes is his stuffed tiger who comes to life in Calvin’s imaginary world. One of Calvin’s favorite creations is to imagine himself as Stupendous Man because Stupendous Man can overcome everything unpleasant in a six-year old boy’s life such as having to go to school and dealing with his arch-enemy, a girl named Susie.

But, when Calvin lies in bed at night in the dark, Stupendous Man’s heart of courage turns to jelly. For, at night the monsters come out and even Stupendous Man can’t overcome the fear they produce. This fear of nighttime monsters identified by Bill Watterson, the creator of Calvin and Hobbes, is one that many of us remember from childhood.

Monsters aren’t found only in childhood. Though they change greatly in character, they are still with us as adults. Monsters lie in wait for us in our darker moments, whispering their fearful messages: “I wonder if he still loves you? Do you have enough money for retirement? Will the test show that your tumor is malignant? What will happen if the war in the Ukraine escalates?” Monster messages are a part of our lives and they bring fear.

The young man, Timothy, who had traveled with Paul on several of his missionary journeys, was facing some monsters in his life. Paul had appointed Timothy to lead the church in the city of Ephesus, but Timothy was struggling. So, since he was in prison and couldn’t travel to visit Timothy, Paul wrote letters to encourage and instruct his young apprentice. I invite you to turn with me to one of those letters, 2 Timothy 1:5-8

I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you. This is why I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands on you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, either, even though I’m in prison for him.

Are you struggling in your faith today? Are you feeling afraid of what is going on in the world and wondering why God doesn’t seem to be doing anything about it? Are you intimidated by the loud and brash voices of our society that disregard the truth of God in favor of their own particular brand of truth? Are you ashamed to call yourself a Christian because you fear the reaction of others? Then, welcome to the long line of believers who over the centuries have felt, and continue to feel, just as you do. The question for us today is not whether we can relate to Timothy, because I think we have all been there. Rather, the question is what we should do about it. We need to fan into flames the work of the Spirit in our lives.

Paul didn’t identify what the monsters were in Timothy’s life that were causing the fear, timidity, and shame that he was experiencing, and I think that was intentional on Paul’s part. He didn’t want Timothy to focus on the monsters. Instead, he wanted Timothy to realize that the faith he had known since childhood, the faith that was still strong in him, was a faith that through the Holy Spirit was able to handle any fear, timidity or shame that the monsters were producing. The Spirit’s power, love, and self-discipline would see him through, and it will see us through, as well.

The power of the Spirit is not a combative or aggressive power. We are not empowered so we can beat down whatever troubles us. Rather, the Spirit’s power is the ability to continue strong in our faith in spite of difficulties. In physics, the definition of power is the energy needed to move an object a certain distance over a defined period of time. Using this definition of power metaphorically, the Spirit’s power is God’s energy within each Christian enabling us to keep moving as followers of Christ until the distance and time of our lives have been fulfilled, that is, until the Lord calls us home to heaven.

The monsters would have us give up in fear; they seek to intimidate us into abandoning our faith; they want to shame us into rejecting Christ. We need the Spirit’s power to keep us going in spite of the monsters. We need the Spirit to energize us for a long obedience in the same direction. And, as the Spirit empowers us, he is also transforming us to become better lovers of God and of others. Like power, love is an action word. It’s about movement, the movement of faith that does not deny Christ, and the movement of love that does not deny the needs of others. And, the Spirit helps us with our self-discipline by transforming the self of who we are from being selfish and self-centered to being God-centered and other-centered.

Several years ago, an elite women’s 3,000 meter race was held in London. After about two-thirds of the race had been run, the woman in front had a sizeable lead and it seemed unlikely anyone would be able to catch her. But then one of the women in the pack began to run harder and slowly she gained on the lead runner until, amazingly, she passed her. Then, with about a ten meter lead, as she crossed the line signaling 200 meters to go, she stopped. She thought the race was over, that she had reached the finishing line, and that she was the winner. Not until she saw the rest of the field race past her on their way to the finish line did she realize her mistake, but it was too late to get back into contention and she didn’t finish the race.

Don’t let the monsters keep you from continuing the race. Don’t let fear, timidity and shame stop you in your faith before you have reached the finish that God has planned for you. When you grow tired and weak and discouraged, pray to the Spirit who lives within you, and ask him for that power, that love, and that self-discipline that will keep you not only running, but running with joy and confidence. Know that while in the world you will have trouble, you need not fear, for your Savior, Jesus Christ, has overcome the world.