

The reading we just heard comes from the end of Paul's first letter to Timothy, and the more I sit with it, the more it reads like part of a commencement address. Paul had been the teacher and Timothy the student. The two first met in a town called Lystra, and Timothy went on to travel with Paul on several of his journeys. But here, near the very end, you can feel Paul handing off the baton — sending Timothy out to go and do this church thing on his own.

Now, full disclosure: ~~like a lot of commencement speeches~~, not every line in this letter has aged especially well. But there is still a great deal of timeless wisdom in it. Some of it is wonderfully practical and down to earth — Paul lays out the qualifications for the people who serve as leaders in the church, which feels awfully timely on a day when we are ordaining and installing elders and deacons. And some of it is less grounded, more mysterious, dwelling in the deep things of faith. Which, again, is exactly what a good commencement address does. For instance,

But it's the ending that has really held my attention this week. In our English translation, it's just nine words: "Take hold of the life that really is life." so let's dig into that.

Just before our reading, Paul is contrasting two different kinds of "life." He warns that the life built on wealth, privilege, power, and dominance is not the life God desires for us. It isn't life-giving at all — it ends up destroying the person living it and everyone around them. And then he turns. *But as for you*, he says, *shun all of this*. And he describes a different life — one marked

by righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. A few sentences later he adds: do good, be rich in good works, be ready to share. It's the mirror image of everything he just warned against. And when we live in these life-giving ways, Paul says, we are taking hold of the life that really is life — a life we can hold onto, steady and secure.

So what does this life really look like? I could stand up here for the next 10 minutes or so and share about it or we can hear from somebody who I think really lives it. so for the rest of the message, we are going to be hearing from someone who I think live this just about better than any human I know.

Earlier this week, my dog Scout and I were out on one of our morning walks, and as she was greeting another person on the trail I and my guest preacher Was right there with me . What we worked out is that she'd tell me what to say, and I'd share it for her, here, in person. She knows that not everybody is comfortable with dogs and some people are allergic to dogs so she wanted to make sure that this was as welcoming a place as possible. So — to our graduates, to the elders and deacons we'll ordain and install today, and to all of us — here is Scout's commencement address.

From Scout

Thank you all for giving me this opportunity to share. I am fairly sure that there hasn't been a message shared by a dog here at RJC before so I hope that

this won't be the only time that this happens. I am humbled that my human thinks that I live this kind of life. I don't necessarily think about it that way, but instead I just try to live. So here goes on what that guy Paul shares (my human read it to me several times as I don't know how to read yet... yet).

**First, behold the beauty.** You humans move too quickly too much of the time. I cannot tell you the number of times my human tells me that we have to get going when I'm doing a big sniff. Yes there are times to get moving quickly (like when I get to chase a goose at the lake) . I know my nose sniffs things much better than your weird looking human noses but it is important to slow down and really take in a big sniff of a tree, a post, a plant, a spot on the ground, and of other creatures. There is so much that is out there that you aren't aware of but if you slowed down you might notice more. I think when Paul talks about righteousness and faith, a big part of that is slowing down to recognize where God is at work. One of my humans' favorite movies is about a high schooler named Ferris Bueller and he once said, "life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while you could miss it." While your noses don't work like mine, some of your other senses are much better than mine - use those to really soak in the wonder that is this world and the people that God has put around you. There is so much mystery and wonder. Soak it in even if you can't sniff it in.

**Second, pay attention to others.** One of the things we dogs are awesome at is picking up on things that our humans don't even know is going on. There are some dogs that have detected diseases in their humans before all your

doctors have! But it is even in how we recognize that you are having a hard day and we try to get you to stop and rest and recover. It makes me sad when I am trying to send that message to my humans and they just keep on stressing when just sitting down on the couch and petting me for a few minutes will help them feel better. The other day my human was really cranky about something that happened and I just kept coming up to him and reminding him that I was there until he finally realized what I was saying. So we sat down together on the couch and the next thing that happened was that he woke up after about a 20 minute nap and felt better! Paying attention to others is something that Paul wrote to Timothy - to do good and to serve others. That Jesus guy knew what he was talking about when he said to look to needs of others before your own.

**Third, be gentle.** I know not all dogs are gentle but gentleness is something that Paul tells Timothy is really important. I wasn't always as gentle as I am now. My first few years I was pretty difficult and I snapped at people when they got too close to me when I was chewing a bone or something. Something I didn't know then was that there were times that my humans were actually trying to help me not eat something I shouldn't (although socks do taste really good). They were doing it because they love me. But I have grown to be very gentle and I think that's important for you humans to do just like Paul tells Timothy here. There are too many humans who aren't gentle and are mean, violent, angry, and take that all out on others in awful ways. I know they do it to dogs sometimes and also to humans and other animals and to all of this beautiful world. That Jesus guy was gentle and caring and when humans say

they should be like Jesus, this is something that can easily be missed. This is what that love of Jesus ~~things~~<sup>thing</sup> is. One of my favoritest things in the world is when we are on a walk and a little human asks if they can pet me. Once I sit down my human says that they can and I just sit there and let them feel my soft ears or run their hands down my back. It means a lot to me when I hear other humans tell my humans how gentle and sweet I am. You humans can be this way as well.

**And last, don't be afraid to share what you need.** This isn't really in what Paul tells Timothy here but there's another place in the Bible where Paul tells Timothy to be sure to take care of himself and his sensitive stomach. Paul reminds Timothy that his needs are important as well. Yes we are supposed to look to others and serve others like Jesus said but we also need to be aware of what we need and be willing to ask others for help. I do this a LOT. I love getting scratches right on my back near my back legs. My humans call them "butt scratches." I will come up to my humans and will turn my butt toward them until they start scratchng. It feels so good. I also know how to tell my humans when I need to go outside and when I'm hungry (although I don't think they feed me as much or as often as I think they should). Sometimes when I am asking them to come sit with me on the couch it isn't just got something going on for them but sometimes I just need someone to be with me. And I know there are times that I go even a bit more direct and poke my humans gently with one of my paws. But when you can't speak human words, you've got to do what you can.

**Can I give one more? Have frens.** My humans are my friends but I also have other friends in my house - a soft llama named Lugnut, an elephant named Sebastian, and a shark named Agnes (and there are a few others too). But they are friends too and they're important to me. I sometimes get so excited when my humans come home that I will go and get one of my friends to show how excited we both are! But Timothy and Paul were friends too - they were important to each other. Paul writes to Timothy here because they cared for and loved each other. We dogs generally like to be in packs - we don't like to be on our own. You humans sometimes think you can do it all on your own but you can't. You need friends. We all do. God gave us one another.

And in closing, you can send me my honorarium in milk bones...

Thank you Scout. Good and wise words. Good girl.