

Monday, April 18, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3

I Thank God For You

The introduction to Paul's letters are often personal and full of gratitude to God. As he begins this letter to the church in Thessalonica (a major trade city in northern Greece), he begins in this same fashion, and makes the point of saying that he remembers them constantly in his prayers. As he prays for them, he remembers in thanksgiving before God the fruits of faith of "**faith...love...hope.**"

On this Easter Monday, I wish to do the same.

Dear Father in heaven, Your abundant love and salvation have been made clear to us once more in our annual remembrance of the death and resurrection of Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. For His suffering and death, as well as His victory over the grave, we give You all thanks and praise.

And yet, Father, You are so abundant in Your giving that You place us in the midst of congregations of Your people. I rejoice and give you thanks for the faith that You have given to the people of Hope Lutheran. Strengthen and encourage them day by day to trust in You and follow You faithfully in all that they say and do.

Gracious God, I thank You as well for the love exhibited among Your redeemed saints at Hope. Continue to spur them on to generous care for those in need, faithful support of Your Church, and regular, daily acts of kindness and mercy that always point those around them to the greater love of Christ.

Mighty Lord, I thank you that these people You have gathered at Hope are people of hope. May they daily exhibit "**steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ,**" that since Christ is Risen, they would be daily strengthened in the promise that we will share in His resurrection. May this living hope in Jesus make each of us bold to share the peace of Christ, knowing that despite the challenges and difficulties of this current age, we have the certainty of eternity in peace and joy with You. In the name of the Risen Jesus, amen.

Prayer – Dear Jesus, lead me regularly to give thanks for Your Church and the people of God who support and encourage me to look to You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

God's Word – God's Power

God's Word brings the power of God into my life. He has used it to build my trust in Him, to reinforce that trust, to guide me through the troubles my life keeps finding. God is not just an idea, nor is He limited to my ideas of His actions. He is powerful!

I am limited in my desires to do good. I find that what I want is not always the best, either for me or for others. Yet, under God's presence, I want to do good things. Then I find that God's Word has the truth and the power to guide me in what I end up doing.

It seems too easy and fair to me to proclaim what I do as a Christian. I visit the sick, or teach the searching heart for God, or stand up for the truth in my investments, or It seems to me that it would be good for God for people to know how He is involving me in His kingdom - but His Word says, "don't let your right hand know about what your left hand is doing." And the message He brings in His Word brings me back to humility.

So easy it is to mistake my desire for fame as a good deed. No, always His Word is true and powerful. How could I even try to go against Him! God's Word made me His, and now His Word keeps me His, and I can trust His Word to bring others to Him as well.

Prayer: Father, You are the powerful one. My efforts only muddy up what you make clean and pure. Please use Your Word to build my faith and guide its actions. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

Read 1 Thess 1:4-10

Lives Transformed by Resurrection

In our reading today, we see what I think we could call the transforming power of the Gospel. The Thessalonians, after they believed in the Gospel, set such an example of faith, that other people couldn't help but notice. They witness not just by words, but by the transformed lives they now live as a result of the life-changing truth of the Gospel. Though they have suffered affliction, this has only enhanced their witness.

The Thessalonians have made a clear change: they have rejected the pagan gods and idols that they formerly worshipped, and which were popular in their own culture. They instead worship the true God. And verse 10 makes it clear that they grasped the full Gospel: that this God has raised his son Jesus from the dead, and that Jesus will return again to save them from wrath.

What about us? We have received the Gospel; we might have even suffered a certain amount of affliction in doing so. But do we truly leave our idols behind and follow the living God? Sometimes we start to slip back into worshipping our idols—money, influence, or ourselves. But here is where we can be reminded again and again that there is only one God who has conquered death, and one Lord over all—Jesus. And Jesus has promised to return and raise us as well.

As we look toward Jesus' second coming, we realize that there is still work to do. We strive toward the "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope". We try to imitate our Lord and our fellow Christians and to provide an example of what a life transformed by the Gospel truly looks like. This is not easy—our sinful nature fights it every day. But by the power of the living Christ, we hold fast to his words of promise and await our deliverance.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give us the transformative power of the truth and the strength to resist the temptation to turn back to false idols. Give us faith to joyfully anticipate your return and our own deliverance from judgment and wrath. Refine our lives so that they may be an example for others. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

Thursday, April 21, 2022
Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Faith Worth Fighting For

“You can’t please everyone.” Usually, we say this phrase in a specific context: after we’ve tried (and failed) to please everyone. We as humans have an intrinsic desire to be liked. In fact, we often can’t stand the idea of being disliked! Therefore, we sacrifice ideals, adjust our personalities, and sometimes abandon our personal beliefs just to try and get someone’s approval. Sometimes we’re willing to abandon our Christian identity and engage in sin simply to avoid the disapproval of our peers. We abandon God to make friends. We sacrifice faith to fit in. And only after we’ve sacrificed as much of ourselves as we’re willing to do we throw up our hands and say, “You can’t please everyone.” We foolishly believe that pleasing everyone is worth sacrificing for, and we don’t recognize the futility of the effort until the damage to ourselves is already done. You can’t please everyone, and that’s a fact.

But brothers and sisters, we aren’t called to please others. No, we are called to *love* others. These two words are not synonymous, though we often think they are. Love can be tough, hard, and certainly displeasing. Loving our neighbors means sacrificing, not our faith, but our earthly status. We love our neighbors by giving them the gospel, whether it pleases them or not. You can’t please everyone, but you certainly can love them.

The only person we need to please is God. But how do I do this? What can I do to please God? Have faith. There is no action or deed we can complete to please God. Instead, the only way to please Him is to have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ who came to live among us, died for us, and rose again for our redemption. This confession, this *faith* is pleasing to God, and that is the only thing that matters. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, you have been given that faith! Just like Paul, you “have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.”

So don’t sacrifice your faith to foster your status in the world. Instead, sacrifice your status in the world to foster your faith. After all, you can’t please everyone. But God is already pleased with you. May the joy of this reality seep into every aspect of our lives and direct all that we say and do.

Prayer: “Lord God, we thank You that You have taught us what You would have us believe and do. Help us by Your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to hold fast Your Word in hearts that You have cleansed that thereby we may be made strong in faith and perfect in holiness and be comforted in life and death; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

- *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, “Prayer for faithfulness,” pg. 1321.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, April 22, 2022

Read 1 Thess 2:1-8 (Especially 5-8)

Even Our Own Selves

We all know what makes someone trustworthy. Everyone who has ever been deceived knows what a liar looks like. In our passage for today, we see that things were no different for Paul. As he was evangelizing in Thessalonica, he didn't come as a salesman. He wasn't out to flatter the people and he wasn't out to make money from them. We've all met people like this before, maybe even bought used cars from them. When someone is flattering you and telling you exactly what you want to hear, we all know they're not telling the truth. This is not how Paul preached among the Thessalonians, not at all. He wasn't out to increase his reputation but to increase God's reputation. He was not willing to throw around his office as an apostle. No, no, no, Paul did none of that. Here is what he did: he was gentle, like a nursing mother. He was affectionate, pursuing his listeners and treating them like they truly matter. He and his coworkers were not only preaching the Gospel, but they were also giving everything they had for these people. They were unwilling to hold back even themselves.

We all know someone who has been willing to share themselves with us. Maybe a friend or a family member or our spouse, someone that has earned our trust completely. And whether we are thinking about Paul or about someone in our life, all of these people who have shared themselves with us and thereby earned our trust are simply imitators of the One who has shared Himself with us completely and without remainder. Jesus Christ gave even His own life for us. Not only in His death but also in His resurrection, He shares His life for us forevermore.

What then is our response? Exactly the same response that Paul's hearers had to him: trust. Christ has come and taught us the way to live according to God's will. He has taught us what to do that will be very best for us. Yet, He has taught us a very difficult way to walk. Those who first heard Him said it was a difficult message and He said that for man it is impossible to keep, but with God all things are possible. And so, we trust Christ that what He said was true and trustworthy. If He says that we ought to love our enemies and bless those who curse you, we trust Him because He shared His own life with us. We know that He loves us and would not lead us astray, so we follow wherever He leads because we know He has shared even His self with us.

Prayer: God of our trust, You sent Christ to share His life with us. Teach us to follow Him and share His life, His death, and His resurrection. Grant us Your Spirit to move us to share ourselves with others to win trust for Your saving Word. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, April 23, 2022

Read [1 Thess 2:9-12](#)

“Called into God’s Kingdom and Glory”

At age 15, Hesham Shehab was handed a sniper rifle and joined the Muslim Brotherhood during the Lebanese Civil War. He later was part of a mortar team, shelling civilians in Christian neighborhoods. Through the intervention of the Holy Spirit and a chance meeting with a Lutheran Pastor in Beirut, Shehab converted to Christianity and is now an LCMS Lutheran pastor in Roselle, Illinois.

Unlike Pastor Shehab and the Apostle Paul, most of us can’t tell such an amazing story of our own transformation from sinner to saint. But every Christian’s new life in Christ provides the world a vision of the glory of God’s Kingdom. Most of us don’t have a background that includes persecuting the Church with bombs or arrests. We mostly were (or would have been) “pretty good” people without coming to know Jesus. But now, after being transformed through the Water and the Word, and learning to “**walk in a manner worthy of God**”, the difference is noticeable.

The Thessalonians were new people in Christ. Their deeds and Spirit were now known across the region, and people knew that the difference was Jesus. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had struck the Thessalonians as being starkly different when they had first visited them. They knew something about them was different and they wanted to hear what they had to say. The Thessalonians had seen the three “**work night and day**” to pay their own way while sharing with them the Good News. Their character was exemplary, marking them as changed people.

For better or for worse, though, the Church is filled with sinners. Most are believing, repentant sinners, but sometimes our sin gives the Church a black eye. We look like a bunch of hypocrites, and God’s life-saving message is lost in our apparently unchanged lives. So, Paul urges them (and us) to continue in our faithful ways. Walk in a God-pleasing manner. Continue to figuratively “give the shirt off your back” to those in need. The Holy Spirit will strengthen you, and the world will see a hint of God’s Kingdom through you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You’ve transformed me into a new creation. Through Your Spirit, continue this work in and through me to reveal Your love to my neighbors. In Your Son’s Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, April 25, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

Not As the Word of Men

You likely have little bits of wisdom that you hold on to. They may have come from hard-earned lessons in your life. Perhaps a parent or grandparent imparted some certain words of wisdom that continue to shape you. You might particularly appreciate a famous quote of a president, teacher, or athlete.

Yet, no matter how helpful these words might be, they are, in Paul's language in our reading today, "words of men." Such words are not necessarily worthless, but God's Word is something else.

By His Word, God created the heavens and earth.

By His Word, God formed humanity from the dust of the ground.

By His Word, God has caused kingdoms to rise and fall.

By His Word made flesh, God brought His presence and salvation to humanity.

By His Word, God's Spirit changes hearts to trust in Christ.

By His Word, God shapes our lives and our eternities.

The Word of God is just different. Certainly, God's Word can guide and direct us, but unlike human wisdom, God's wisdom in His Word is always trustworthy. But God's Word does so much more – forgive, enliven, create, restore, and more.

We are wise to consider words of human wisdom and to hold on to helpful words that we gather along the way. But when it comes to God's Word, the stakes are so much higher. For in His Word is life itself.

"We thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers." (1 Thess 2:13)

Prayer – Dear Lord, help me to regularly hear and receive your word, and through it, be at work in me to believe and follow You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Sharing Life and Joy

There is a great joy that comes in fellowshiping, in sharing with others our life, our joys, and even our sorrows. This is especially true when we share the joy of knowing our Lord and being excited for each other at the salvation He has brought us.

With that joy comes a sorrow as well, for life with its interference from the Devil brings changes. Where we once had time for the glorious joy of sharing with each other, comes separation. Separation against our will, but strong and continuous.

That sorrow comes to all in this life - one happiness that we look forward to is an elimination of that separation, of the joy of reunification with our loved ones, with those we have appreciated sharing life with, even those we are only able to spend a short time with.

I rejoice and am glad in the promises of God. Not just His personal promise of salvation, but also the assurance that He has more for others, that I am not and will not be alone in that salvation. There are so many others who need His gifts. I thank you, God, for those promises for them as well as for me.

Prayer: Please God, let others know of Your grace and generousness. Please let me be part of Your reaching out to them. Use me, guide me, and show me Your gifts for others. Let them know the same joy You have shared with me. I rest then in Your promises. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

Read 1 Thess 3:1-5

Encouraged and Encouraging

Yesterday was Call Day at the seminary—the day when many students are given their assignments for vicarage or for their first call. Although I did not take a call this year due to continuing on to graduate school, it was still a great day to reflect on how God blesses congregations through raising up pastors, teachers, deaconesses, missionaries, and other church workers.

In our reading from 1 Thessalonians today, we see Paul raising up Timothy and sending him to “establish and exhort” the Thessalonian Christians in their faith. Paul cares deeply for these people, and although he cannot go himself to visit them, he sends someone he trusts, Timothy, to attend to them. Paul realizes that in the face of suffering and persecution, as the Thessalonians were experiencing, the encouragement of fellow Christians is a blessing and can help that suffering to be endured.

We’ve probably all experienced this in one way or another. It is one reason we have pastors—so that there is someone for every congregation of God’s people to care for the souls of those people as they go through this earthly life. But pastors aren’t the only ones who can do this! Every Christian can be an encourager, someone who exhorts others to endure and remain steadfast no matter what is happening. This might be with prayer or a kind word. It might be with an act of service we do for someone else who is struggling or suffering. There are many ways to encourage people and build them up in their faith—and it’s our responsibility as well as our joy to do this. For we know that when we are suffering or have need of encouragement, those around us will also build us up and help us.

This is what it means to be Christians and what it means to be the church. Though we are sinful people, we have been baptized and had our faith strengthened by the Holy Spirit as he works through our fellow Christians, both near and far. We also see in Christ our example of how to endure suffering—and so we always have Christ, our savior, to point people to when they need encouragement. Because the reality is that we don’t struggle alone—in addition to the church, we have a savior who is acquainted with suffering, and who has redeemed us by his life, death, and resurrection.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me. I often fail to see the suffering in those around me. Keep me aware of the ways in which I can serve others and encourage them. Grant me also the humility to accept encouragement from others. Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

Thursday, April 28, 2022
Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Accident-Free

Growing up, my family had a dog. Her name was Roxy and we loved her like she was one of the family. But no matter how well we treated her or how much we loved her, Roxy was still a dog. And this fact was never more evident than during long family trips. Weeks in advance we'd fret over finding a shelter for Roxy or (more often than not) finding someone to check in on her every now and then throughout the trip. Then, during the trip, we'd fret the whole time hoping that she was okay, well fed, and (most importantly) not leaving any...surprises for us on the floor. I remember my parents worrying constantly, just hoping that Roxy didn't have an accident while we were away. And then finally coming home, we'd open the door hoping that the house didn't smell like week-old waste. Most times, we came home to an accident-free home, and we were all overjoyed and proud of Roxy for not leaving us a disgusting mess to clean up.

Well, this isn't the exact scenario that Paul is describing in our text, but it is shockingly similar. Paul and his followers established a church at Thessalonica and things were running smoothly. But then they had to leave. They had to go on a long trip, and they were worried that, while they were away, the Thessalonians might have an accident. Just like Roxy who was left at home all alone without her masters, the Thessalonians were left without their teachers. They were scared, lonely, and confused. They were in the perfect position to doubt Paul, question his teachings, and fall from faith. They were in the perfect position for an accident.

So Paul worried. He worried so much that part-way through their trip, he sent Timothy back to check on them to see if there were any messes to clean up when they got back. But Timothy found none. Upon hearing this, Paul was overjoyed and proud of the Thessalonians! Though they were without the teacher, they had his teachings, and that was enough to keep them firm in their faith regardless of the loneliness, fear, and uncertainty.

May it be so with us. We don't see Jesus, but we do have His Word. We don't see the teacher, but we do have His teachings. May this be enough for our faith, so when Jesus comes back from His long trip on the final day, He finds no "accidents". May we remain firm in faith, so on the last day, Jesus, filled with joy and pride, will say, "well done, my good and faithful servant. You have finished the race. You have kept the faith." Amen.

Prayer: "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, "Prayer for steadfast faith," pg. 1320.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, April 29, 2022

Read 1 Thess 3:11-13

Blameless in Holiness

"Blameless" and "Holiness" are words that we don't hear much in our present world. It hardly even occurs to us what Paul means when he wishes us to be established blameless in holiness. Blameless to us means that something wrong has happened, but we didn't intend for it to happen. Holiness to us doesn't make any sense because there is just about nothing holy in our society anymore. If someone is "holy," they are proud, self-justified, and look down on others.

Beloved, it ought not to be so among us. Though our culture looks down on these virtues or, worse, ignores them, these are precisely the values that Christians seek after that we might not be found wanting. Yet we cannot find blamelessness or holiness on our own. If we have become filthy with our sin or unholy with our lack of love, we are powerless to do anything about it. It would be like trying to dry a table with a wet towel. Absolutely futile.

Yet, God is miles ahead of us. He intends to make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all. God wants to fill our hearts with the same love that drove Jesus to die for us and make us blameless and holy. He wants us not only to be prepared for His return, but it would even please Him that our lives might serve as an example to our world. We are to stand as an example of what it means to be blameless in holiness and to make it something worth being. It seems that God might even use us to bring other people to faith and the knowledge of the One who took on all of our blame and sin that we might be cleansed and poured out His heart so that our hearts might be filled with love.

Prayer: Father, you have cleansed us from all sin to walk before you blameless in holiness. Fill us with love and with Your Spirit that we might show others the wonders of your love with our lives of holiness. Use us to call more and more people unto Yourself, brothers and sisters to stand with us at the coming of Your Son. Amen, Come Lord Jesus.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, April 30, 2022

Read [1 Thess 4:1-8](#)

“Holy Living”

“Finally, then, brothers (and sisters), we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.” Paul had heard the report of how the Thessalonians had received his message of Good News in Christ, taken it to heart, and were now living new lives as changed people. The previous chapter told about his fears that they’d fall away under the trials of persecution, followed by his joy over learning what God had done through them.

And so, he urges them to continue doing what they’re doing, and even more. He explains how God’s will is for believers to live “holy” lives – as fundamentally changed people. He then lists the reasons for this: 1. It’s God’s will. 2. You now know God 3. Sin hurts people. Really, really hurts people 4. Your sin can lead to God’s judgement on others 5. It can bring judgement on you, even eternal judgement if it turns you from faith.

I was reminded of a nearly perfect image of this lesson just last night. My wife and I and four others from Hope attended the annual fundraising banquet of the MyLife Medical & Resource Center (pregnancy center). Hearing stories of their 16 years of ministry makes you experience that joy that Paul felt. These men & women, young and old, paid and volunteer staff – live amazing, “holy” lives before the young women and couples that are drowning in the sinful world around them.

They’re drowning because of all the fears that an unplanned pregnancy can cause – financial costs, rejection by family and friends, the end of their life plans, and so on. The staff doesn’t look particularly different than most people, but as they speak to clients, the peace of Christ calms those fears. God’s love and forgiveness, won by God’s Son on the cross for them – stills the turbulence that’s overwhelming them.

Simple Christian people, living lives faithful to God’s promises, have led to over 1,300 live births in 16 years, along with countless people who came to know Christ by the change He brings to troubled people. So, **“as you are doing, do so more and more.”**

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your never-ending love for all Your little children. Help us to lift up the least of these, Your children – our neighbors, to know You through Your Son, Jesus, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 2, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

What Are You Aiming For?

When I was in little league, I had a friend at the time named Michael. He was big for our age, and a little awkward because of it. To us, it seemed he could throw the ball 100 miles per hour. Only one problem, no one knew where it was going. During one game, Michael had the ball hit to him in right field. He scooped up the ball on one hop. The runner rounded first and headed to second, and Michael threw a bullet straight into our dugout behind third base and almost decapitated our coach.

With a remarkable calmness, Coach called Michael over when the inning was over. Coach simply asked him, "what were you aiming for?" Michael replied, "I didn't. I just wanted to throw it in quickly." To which Coach advised, "Let's aim from now on."

What are you aiming for? Paul gives the Thessalonian Christians (and us) some targets: Aim for more. Aspire. Focus your mind. Work. All of these make sense as goals or targets, it's just that the world would aim differently. Building on the earlier part of the chapter, Paul urges us to aim our lives keeping in mind that we are in the Lord Jesus. His love, forgiveness, and mercy for us shape our targets.

Aim for more, but not the more the world would encourage. Love one another "**more and more,**" and that means caring for one another and pointing one another to Jesus.

Aspire not to your own targets, but "**aspire to live quietly.**" Draw attention only by following Christ, not by seeking fame or self-importance. (What a difference from our world today!)

Focus your mind. "**Mind your own affairs.**" Don't obsess over what others have or what others do. Such a focus will lead you way off target into jealousy and ingratitude.

Work. "**work...and be dependent on no one.**" Paul is concerned about Christians who stopped working to just wait for Jesus to return. Instead, we care for our neighbors and honor God by using the gifts that He has given us, "**working heartily, as for the Lord...knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward** (Col. 3:23-4)."

Dear Christian friends, let's aim from now on.

Prayer – Dear Lord, help me to aim my life and gifts toward truly serving those around me, and thereby, serving You. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16

A Mistake?

Did God make a mistake? When He promised to save me - was that at the cost of saving others? Did God limit the number being saved or is my salvation mean I won't know those who have died before me? Or ...

God does NOT make mistakes! He keeps His promises, He saves all, not limiting His grace for any that love Him. He promised those dying before me, that He would save them. They are indeed saved. They are waiting with Him for the resurrection to the new heavens/new earth. They wait there with Him, I wait here with Him. Really, not much difference.

That last day will come, that day when evil will be removed from the world. All those living in Jesus will be there with Him, both those living on the earth and those living with Him in heaven. We will be reunited with those we have loved and known. Reunited, knowing that parting in death is finished, knowing that now we joined with God in Jesus forever.

Peter recognized Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration. So, we too will have time, time enough to meet and know them also, though we do get to know them now from the Bible where they speak to us, even now. So too we have God's promise that our tears are gone, our disabilities due to sin are gone. So we have that great future to look forward to, a time when we live with God and those others of our life.

Prayer: Thank You God, not only for my salvation but for the promise of the others You have given salvation to. Let Your Word remind me and build me towards that day. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Read 1 Thess 5:1-4

Anticipating the End

In our reading for today, beginning chapter five of 1 Thessalonians, St. Paul continues to talk about the “Day of the Lord”, what we might call the Last Day or even Judgment Day. The idea of the end of the world is one we see a lot, even in the culture around us. There are lots of movies, books, and video games which tell stories about what the end of the world might look like. And it can even be confusing or at times cause us anxiety.

Looking at the state of the world today, it might make us think that the Day of the Lord must be coming any second now. There are wars, civil unrest, immorality, political fighting, and more. All of these things make us think that it must be the end times. That anxiety and worry start to creep in, perhaps.

But in these verses, St. Paul is not intending to cause anxiety. In fact, he’s trying to do the opposite—to ease the worries and fears of the Thessalonians, and also us today. Although Paul warns us that the Day of the Lord will come suddenly, like a thief in the night, and that it is more likely to come when there is peace and security—when we *don’t* expect it. Ultimately, however, we need to realize that no matter when it comes, the Day of the Lord is not something for us to fear. For we are not in darkness! We have the light of Christ, our savior. And knowing Jesus and what he has done for us takes away our fears and worries.

For us Christians, the Day of the Lord will be a happy and joyous day, as we come into the physical presence of our savior Jesus for all eternity. There will be no more war, famine, unrest, evil. All those things will go away forever. It’s true that for those who do not believe, the Day of the Lord will be one of terrible judgment. But rather than cause us to despair, that should encourage us to spread the Gospel all the more to those who haven’t yet heard of what Jesus has done for them in his life, death, and resurrection.

So, when you feel worry or that the end must be coming near, remember your baptism. For in baptism, we were made children of God, and brought out of darkness. We don’t have to fear the return of our Lord, in fact we look forward to it with joy and anticipation! Though the world has always been in the “end times” since Jesus came to earth, and sin continues to ravage us, we know the final victory comes in Jesus. And each day is one day closer to that final victory over sin, death, and the devil. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that you would grant us a spirit of joy and anticipation as we look toward your return, whenever that may come. Take away any worries or fears we may have and strengthen our faith in the midst of chaos. Send your Holy Spirit among us, that on the Last Day we might be found doing your will in proclaiming the Gospel to the world. In your name we pray, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

Thursday, May 5, 2022
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11

Children of Light

I remember 10 years ago, back in 2012, when everyone was talking about the end of the world. Hurricane Sandy was hitting in full force, the Mayan calendar ended, and Sony Pictures even made a movie called “2012” which depicted the world ending that year. People were worried and anxious. People were living in the darkness of hopelessness, fear, and anticipation. Society as a whole thought that the end was near, and that idea left a looming darkness over everything.

Flash forward to current times and very much of the same darkness is present today. Killer hornets traveled West and ravaged much of the countryside, glaciers are melting, and the COVID pandemic seems to rage on with no clear end in sight. Over these past couple of years, the end of the world seemed to fill society’s thoughts, and many people found themselves in the darkness of hopelessness, fear, and anticipation. They were (and many still are) afraid of the end. They’re living in darkness.

Well, it’s during times like these that we can really take Paul’s words to the Thessalonians to heart. It seems as though they were living in a time of darkness, and time when society looked toward the end in hopelessness, fear, and anticipation. But the Christians were different. They had Christ, the light of the world. Jesus had worked within them, He had redeemed them, and He had saved them from sin and the looming darkness that it brought. They had been adopted into the family of God, and that meant they weren’t trapped in the darkness of hopelessness, fear, and anticipation anymore. No, they were children of light! Through Jesus they were bathed into hope, love, and eagerness for the coming of Christ! They didn’t belong to the darkness. They belonged to the day, and that’s where they were going to remain forever and ever, amen!

Nothing has changed. Just as Paul’s Lord is the same today, Paul’s message is the same, as well. We are different. We aren’t covered in darkness. We are God’s chosen people, we are the children of the day, and we bask in Jesus Christ the light of the world! The end of all things is inevitable, but we don’t fear it like those living in darkness because, like the Thessalonians, we are “not destined for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” We are children of the light that no darkness can overcome! Thanks be to God!

Prayer: “I’m looking for the coming of Christ. I want to be with Jesus. When we have run with patience the race, we shall know the joy of Jesus. In Him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light of the city of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.”

- *LSB* 411, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,”

Today’s Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, May 6, 2022

Read 1 Thess 5:12-13

Esteem them in Love

As I was considering my calling to the seminary, it was an unfortunate reality that financial questions were front and center: should I seek a more lucrative career and serve the church in other ways, how will I afford four years of seminary after four years of college, how will I support myself during those eight years without an income, will I be able to support a family on a pastor's salary? And now that I'm in the seminary, these become practical questions of church administration: what should a pastor make, what kind of benefits does the church owe him, what kind of benefits can the church afford, should a pastor have a second job, how will we recruit new church workers (pastors, DCEs, teachers, etc.) if we can't promise them a good enough salary to pay off their loans?

This morning's short devotion will answer none of these questions as Paul was not interested in them in our text for today. Still, he does talk about one thing that we all owe to those who have committed their lives to the Lord's service: respect. The Lord has raised up certain men and women among us to do His will in a special way, standing on His behalf to speak His words of condemnation and absolution. Often, we have a habit of picking and choosing how to respect those in spiritual authority. Being skeptical of authority is deeply ingrained into our culture. We are so used to evaluating the claims of politicians, salespeople, even of our family, that we bring this attitude into the church where it absolutely does not belong. We take everything with a grain of salt, especially words that tell us what to do. Paul talks about those who admonish us as those whom we should respect beyond all measure. This makes good sense. It's easy to find a "yes man," a guide who will tell you just what you want to hear, someone who will never point out to you when you're in the wrong and ought to change. It is difficult to tell us what is difficult to hear: we are sinners. So, those who bring that word to us are worthy of the greatest respect. Instead of a posture of questioning them, we should assume that they say these things for our benefit, so that we can live more faithfully to God's will and be more like Christ. To that end, we respect our church workers when we do ensure their financial security but even more so when we pray for them, when we support their labors, and when we respect them as those whom the Lord has put into our lives for our own good.

Prayer: Lord of the Church, you have raised up many good and faithful laborers in your harvest fields. Teach us to respect them, help us to pray for them, and show us ways to encourage them. Knowing that the harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few, also raise up from among us more laborers to do your work for our good and the good of the whole world. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, May 7, 2022

Read [1 Thess 5:14-15](#)

“Encouragement, Patience, and Goodness”

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle (also translated as “disorderly” or “undisciplined”), encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

Nearing the end of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul summarizes his message and offers them some final thoughts. He urges them to strive to be nothing other than “Christ-like”. Look at that list – it simply describes much of Jesus’ ministry. Those are the actions that endeared Him to the crowds, especially to those who were poor and suffering. That was the scandal that set Jesus apart from the Jewish leaders of His day – He went into the homes of sinners and tax collectors. His followers were nobodies; He touched, healed, and didn’t even “social distance” with lepers and the dead.

Paul had already commended the Thessalonians for having continued following Jesus’ example. Their “holy living” had made them stand out from the world around them. The world might not care for the fainthearted and the weak – but they did, as Jesus had. Paul’s advice here, though, was necessary encouragement. Just as they needed to be reminded to continue to live lives as Christ did, you and I need this same urging. After all, these things aren’t part of our sinful human nature; we have to thoughtfully consider our actions and remember our calling. And the world around us challenges us at every turn.

The big news this week, that the Supreme Court is considering overturning *Roe vs. Wade* (the 1973 ruling “legalizing” abortion), will likely lead to innumerable opportunities for us to follow Paul’s advice in the coming weeks. As Christians, we can certainly rejoice when the lives of the unborn are protected, but the emotions and beliefs on both sides of this issue are intense and deeply held. We must be the “strong ones” in the discussion, as we represent the strongest One of all, Jesus. So, again, we read Paul’s exhortation:

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.”

Prayer: Almighty God, You chose to come into our world as a meek, humble, and unusual Man. Fill us with His Spirit that we may follow His example – winning more for Your kingdom through kindness, patience, and love. In His Name, Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 9, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

Hold Fast

As Paul comes towards the end of this first letter to the Thessalonian Christians, he gives a lot of helpful instructions, but he concludes with this summary to “hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” The second part is not easy for us sinners, but it makes sense. On the other hand, what does it really mean to “hold fast.”

“Hold fast” was originally a term of Norwegian and Dutch sailors who often repeated, “houd vast” meaning “hold tight.” The phrase was brought into English as “hold fast.” In a general sense, the sailing advice encouraged everyone to bear down and fight through the storm. More specifically, when these words were spoken it was a reminder that when on deck, you dedicate a hand for the ship and a hand for you. That means in order to help your crew you must make sure that you are taken care of. A ship needs every member in an emergency and if you are washed overboard you are no help to anyone. Because of that fact, you always secure on hand to the ship. Once you are secured and ready to take on the waves you can use the other hand to help yourself and crew. That working hand is used to ensure the ship and all of its crew will successfully make it through the storm.

The implications for the Christian life are many. To hold fast to what is good is to cling to THE Good, the good news of free salvation in Christ. To hold fast to what is good is to hold on for dear life to Christ and His Word alone. The One who calmed the winds and waves is the only One who can see us through the storms of this life. To cling first to anything or anyone else will soon leave us washed overboard.

Yet as we cling to Christ, once you are secured and ready to take on the waves you can use the other hand to help yourself and the crew. Holding fast to Christ and His Word (knowing that He holds us), we **“encourage the fainthearted...help the weak...be patient with all...seek to do good to one another...rejoice always...pray without ceasing.”** Holding fast to Christ, we reach out in all these ways to hold fast to others with His strong love, especially while the storms rage.

Prayer – Dear Lord, help me hold fast to You that I may reach out in Your love. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

He Never Fails

I live in a very troubled world. Strife! Everywhere! There are wars and gossips in other places. News and its effects concern me. But close there are similar troubles - I worry about my neighbors, are getting more than me? Are they going to take from me my property or my reputation? I don't see that I am peaceful, nor are those around me.

But ... I forget. I'm not in charge and I know that though the devil is stirring up trouble, dissension, and grief, yet I know that God has intervened in the world. I know that God is a God of peace.

Not only is He a God that appreciates and supports those who are peaceful. He has defeated the troublemaker, the liar whose temptations cause us to lose sight of peace. God causes peace! He comes to me, reminding me that He has rescued me from my inside troubles, paying the cost of my sinfulness. He has made peace between me and Himself! There may not appear to be peace outside me, but the real peace is the one He placed on my heart and life.

But there is more. God does not sit back and let the world trouble who it wills. He watches over and blocks the extent and nature of evil. He stilled the sea for the disciples. He fed the hungry with the five loaves and two fish. He brought Israel through the Red Sea. He brings peace to me, and I can and do count on it. He never fails.

Prayer: Thank you God for peace. I thank you for placing peace in me and that I can trust You to peace around me as well. Keep my attention on You and not on the excitement around me. Amen

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 11, 2022
Read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Growing in Faith and Love

Today our reading moves us from 1 Thessalonians into 2 Thessalonians, the second letter that St. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica. In the first couple of verses we see Paul give his typical greeting. You might notice that verse 2 is very familiar, many preachers (including myself) often use it to open their sermons.

Then in the next couple of verses Paul expresses his thanksgiving for the Thessalonians. The people in the church there were evidently doing a pretty good job in their lives as Christians. Paul tells us that their faith was growing, presumably as they continued to gather for worship together, received the Lord's Supper together, and taught one another according to the Gospel which was proclaimed to them. As a result, love increased among them. This is a beautiful picture of how the church ought to function: it should be a place where Word and sacrament are used to build up the faith of believers and the mutual encouragement and friendship that the Gospel brings.

Verse 4 goes even further when Paul mentions that the Thessalonians are held up to other churches as a model of steadfastness and faith, even in the face of persecution. This is what every church should hope for! Not out of arrogance, but out of a genuine desire to "be the church" in all of the best possible ways.

These verses show us that when persecution or hard times come to the church, the church doesn't really change what it is supposed to be doing. Sometimes churches think they need to fight back against the secular culture by changing who they are, or by "mixing things up" and altering the way they do things. But the Thessalonian church shows even us today that what made them strong was not a reliance on worldly power or fighting back. Instead, their strength lay in being the church and doing what they were called to do: building one another up in faith and knowledge of the truth, and showing love to one another. This can be hard to do. But we have Christ and the Holy Spirit working among us to make it possible. As we seek to love one another, we continue to come together in worship and fellowship. Thanks be to God for these abundant gifts!

Prayer: Lord, keep our minds always directed to love toward one another and toward you, with the goal that we might build one another up. Give us endurance when things seem against us, and remind us of your promises as we gather around your means of grace. Help us to love one another, even when it is difficult. In your Son's holy name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

Thursday, May 12, 2022
Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

Why and When?

The Christians in Thessalonica were having problems, namely, they were experiencing affliction and persecution. Sometime before this, they had also been experiencing affliction, so Paul had written a letter (now known as 1 Thessalonians) to them to encourage them and assure their faith. That had worked for a while, but now, the Thessalonians were experiencing more affliction again! We get the sense that the Christians in Thessalonica were looking up to the heavens, shaking their fists in the air, and yelling, "What the heck, God?! Why are we still suffering? Haven't we been doing what You wanted? We've even stayed true to what Paul, Your apostle said to us! When will our suffering go away?" The Thessalonians were struggling with affliction and found themselves asking, "Why is this happening?" and "When will it end?" The Thessalonians saw affliction as a form of divine punishment for something they were doing incorrectly or not at all. So, they wrote to Paul asking what they were missing and how they could fix it, to end their affliction.

In response, Paul wrote a second letter to the church in Thessalonica hoping to answer their questions, but they weren't the answers the Christians were expecting. Paul told them that their affliction, though hard and painful, was "evidence of the righteous judgment of God." Their affliction was actually something to be thankful for! After all, Jesus Himself was rejected by the world and warned His disciples of the same treatment. Paul told them that affliction wasn't a sign of divine punishment, but rather evidence of being "considered worthy of the kingdom of God." Having answered the "Why?" Paul moved on to the "When?" He says that Christians, being in a godless world, will live with affliction until that Judgment Day when Jesus comes back again. On that day, those deserving punishment will be punished and those suffering affliction will receive relief. Paul tells them, "I know this life is hard, brothers and sisters, but Jesus is coming back. And when He does, we will be set free from pain, suffering, and strife. So, remain sure in Him and have steadfast faith."

This truth still holds true today. So, as you go through your life and wrestle daily with affliction and strife, as you find yourself stumbling with no clear motive or end in sight, as you wish nothing more than to raise your fist at God and ask, "Why?" remember who you are and whose you are. This life is hard, but you are one of God's people. And Jesus is coming back. And when He does, you will be set free from pain, suffering, and strife. So, remain sure in Him and have steadfast faith. Amen.

Prayer: "Almighty God, grant us a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ, a cheerful hope in Your mercy, and a sincere love for You and one another; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- *LSB*, "Collect for faith, hope, and love," pg. 310.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, May 13, 2022

Read 2 Thess 2:1-12

Mysteries

There's nothing more interesting than a mystery. If you tell people you have a secret, they want to know what it is. We love the idea of having secret or hidden knowledge, so it's no wonder that passages like today's grab our attention. Much ink has been spilled over the questions raised by such an enigmatic passage. Who is the man of lawlessness? What is the rebellion? Who restrains the man of lawlessness? Is this about the antichrist? When is the day spoken about? There are many plausible answers to these questions, some more faithful than others, but none absolutely certain. There's nothing explicitly wrong with trying to solve them, but there is a certain danger in it.

Paul reminds us that there's danger of deception, of being shaken in mind or alarmed by spirits or words or writings that seem to be orthodox. But Christianity is not a speculative religion about having hidden knowledge or uncovering certain mysteries. There are many hidden things of God which are only partially revealed, we see them "as in a mirror, dimly." Our faith is not based on these things, though, so it cannot be shaken by them. There is one foundation without which we are shaken: Jesus Christ and His work. If we did not have Christ, we would indeed be easily shaken and lost. But because we have Christ, there is nothing that can shake us. Firm in Christ, we can entertain uncertain passages like this one without much danger. Perhaps the man of lawlessness is Satan, perhaps the Antichrist, perhaps they are all the same figure, perhaps they are all different. The Spirit may be the one restraining him, it may be another. One day, all these mysteries will be revealed to us, but for now they are mysteries. Therefore, we should cling to the one thing that is sure and certain and unshakeable: Christ crucified, our Lord and our God.

Prayer: God of all mysteries, You have chosen to reveal some things and keep some things hidden. We thank you that you have chosen to reveal to us in these last days Your Son, Himself the foundation of our faith. Enlighten us to see everything in light of what is certain and keep us from being troubled by speculation or fear. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, May 14, 2022

Read [2 Thess 2:13-15](#)

“Beloved by the Lord”

Have you ever discovered, just after brushing your teeth, that you hadn't yet finished your orange juice? After downing the last mouthful, you realize that's a terrible mistake – both products taste good, but not in that order! Soon, we'll be eating fresh produce from gardens, but don't even think about enjoying a big, juicy tomato after a bowl of ice cream – aahhhgg!

Similarly, yesterday's reading would be a terrible message to close with. If Paul's letter ended at verse 12, our future would look bleak. The Thessalonians had already been groaning under persecution that had no end in sight. The hope that kept them going was that Jesus would return and bring them into Paradise. Paul had told them about Jesus coming back and the glorious eternity before them, but now it seemed he'd dashed cold water on that. Their travails were to go on – even getting worse before they got better – and they should rejoice to be considered worthy to suffer for Christ's kingdom!

With hindsight, we know that the persecution suffered by the early Church, while taking the lives of many and even the faith of some, did end. But we also know that the “spirit of lawlessness” continues in our world today, and it has grown stronger. Death and crime, violence and inflation, corruption and favoritism – all abound. And even in the Church, some are misled by leaders calling sin “just another choice”, or otherwise denying the cross of Christ.

Which only makes today's reading all the more sweet. Like Paul, I “**give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved**”. “Beloved by the Lord” is quite a title to wear, and God gave it to you even before He created the world! Through all the twists and turns of history – the highs and the lows, the delivered promises and the sadly delivered destructions – God has continued to bring His Good News to His people.

He delivered that Word to the Thessalonians by Paul and his friends, which has now found its way to your ears and hearts. And that Word has been sanctified in you by Christ's Spirit, leading you to believe the wondrous Truth of God's love. That Truth partially overcomes the darkness of today's lawlessness, and will on the Last Day blow it away forever.

Prayer: Almighty God, keep us firmly in Your Words of Truth, and fill our lives with the Light of the World. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson

Monday, May 16, 2022

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Comforted and Established Hearts

A number of years ago, I was speaking to a military chaplain about the unique role that he had to play in spiritually supporting members of the Armed Forces. He told me that one of the strange parts was that he had a different priority than the military did. He said, "When soldiers have been through the worst, my main goal is to share the comfort of the Gospel. The military's main purpose for me is to help the soldier get his head right and get back to work."

For the Thessalonian Christians, Paul seems to have both of these goals in mind. **"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."** That word, "establish," means to strengthen, like putting up support beams. So you see both parts. Yes, the comfort comes first from Christ **"who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace."** The gracious, sacrificial work of Christ for us on the cross is a ground of comfort when we have been through the worst – for we know Christ has promised peace, joy, and life beyond the struggles of this world. Not just that, He comforts our hearts when we have been the worst – forgiving us and restoring our relationship to God by His death and resurrection. Our hearts know the comfort of Jesus.

That comfort is the foundation of our strength. In the words of the chaplain, our head is put right to get back to work. Or as Paul says, we are **"establish(ed) in every good work and word."** The One who comforts our hearts, gives us words of comfort to share and shapes our lives by His Word. We have hearts that earnestly desire to follow God's commands, reach out to others in compassion, and care for the least and the hurting in our midst. His purpose is two-fold: to give us comfort and establish our hearts.

Prayer – Lord Jesus, you have loved me and given me eternal comfort and good hope through grace. Comfort my heart anew today and strengthen my heart in every good work and word. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Jason

Tuesday, May 17, 2022

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Open the Doors!

There are so many who don't know God, who are lost thinking there is no way out for them. They need the message from God that - wrongness exists, and it exists in them, but God has intervened in Jesus. God himself has taken on our nature, though without wrongness, and paid the price that being wrong deserves. God has given us that way out, and He gives us the trust to accept what He has done and continues to support us with His power to do good and avoid wrongness.

They need that message, the message that is the Bible. They need it, but there are so many hindrances in the world. When I try to work through those obstacles, I fail. I cannot overcome the world myself - it was Jesus who has saved me, who has built in faith for me. It is Jesus who needs to open the door for those needing Him to be able to hear the message - and accept it.

Now I do have a relationship with Jesus. He is my Savior and my life director. He has asked me to talk to him (in what we call prayer). And I do. So, part of my requests to Him is for Him to open doors so that people are able to hear and respond to the message of the Bible. Yes, I know He will do that without my request, yet it is important for me to care about those people - and to express that care in my talking to Him!

Prayer: I thank you Lord for bringing the message and its power to my life. I thank you also for caring about the others out there. Please let them know about Salvation too. Open the doors for them! Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Pastor Art Bolstad

Wednesday, May 18, 2022

Read 2 Thess 3:6-12

Working in the Light of the Gospel

In today's reading, St. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their obligation to work. It seems from these verses that a situation had arisen where many of them were consumed by idleness, by their laziness. Perhaps they thought that the world would end soon, and that there was therefore no need for them to continue doing much of anything. But St. Paul exhorts them that this ought not be so!

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that when he, Silvanus, and Timothy were among the Thessalonians they worked alongside them. This was to provide them an example, but it seems some of the Thessalonians drifted! This can happen to us too. After all, we all bear the stains of original sin—and because of that, working cheerfully is not something that comes naturally to us. We tend toward idleness and laziness. And so just as we see that the Thessalonians are warned against those sins, we are as well.

Now, this doesn't mean that we should never stop working, or that we should feel guilty when we take a vacation or take some leisure time. After all, God rested on the seventh day and set it aside as a day when his people were not to do work. But I do think that these verses call us to think more deeply about how we spend our time. After all, our job is not our only vocation, and it is not the only place where hard work takes place. Instead, we should examine all of the different vocations God has placed us in, within the home, in society, in the church. How can we keep from being idle in each of these areas? The call is to use the talents and gifts that God has given to us in ways that benefit our neighbor and build up the body of Christ.

Verse 12 reminds us that while these words are a command, they are also an encouragement. And they are centered in our Lord, Jesus Christ. By his works and his willingness to live and die on our behalf, we have the ultimate example of one who did not despise the work set before him. Rejoicing in the fact that we are forgiven, even of the sins of laziness, idleness, and being a busybody, we can work humbly and quietly to serve our neighbor as he would have us do. It's not always easy—but here is where encouragement from fellow believers, prayer, and staying in God's Word can be so helpful. Sadly, our spiritual lives are often where we tend to be the most idle or lazy. But God in his Word points out to us ways in which we have fallen short and need forgiveness—and then guides us back into the way that he would have us work and live.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank You that in Baptism You have broken into my life, unified me with the life of Christ, and chosen me for citizenship in Your kingdom. I praise You for this inheritance, this home, this family. I bless You for never having forgotten me and never ceasing to yearn for me, to seek me, to call me, to offer me forgiveness anew. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Alex Smith

Thursday, May 19, 2022
Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

We're all in this together

As strange as this may seem, this passage is meant to encourage brotherly love and unity. At first glance, this may seem unlikely. Paul's message is essentially this: "do good, and if you see someone not doing good, cast them aside in shame." He then tacks on the classic, "I'm only doing this because I love you," afterwards. This may seem rather far-fetched, cruel, and even heartless from Paul, but he's saying these words to affirm a very well-known concept: we're all in this together.

Christianity in Thessalonica had been growing and many people had started to become idle in their faith. This idleness caused some of them to slow down in their good works and soon their Christian lives screeched to a halt. Many of them no longer lived in the salvation they had been given and this caused their faith to falter. They had become idle; toeing the line between salvation and condemnation. Their lives were at stake.

This was a problem.

In response, Paul writes this letter, answering Cain's age-old question. Paul tells them, "Yes, you **are** your brother's keeper! We're all in this together!" According to Paul, we are the body of Christ, unified by our faith in His promises. We are all in this battle of life together! But we are far from perfect, and sometimes our brothers and sister become idle. Paul suggests that, when that happens, separate yourself from them so as not to be negatively influenced. Treat them as an enemy, but don't think of them as an enemy. Instead, give them the cold shoulder. Perhaps they will feel so ashamed that they will be enticed to come out of their idleness.

While Paul's suggestion may seem harsh, his point is very caring. When a brother or a sister in Christ is fading from the faith, work to bring them back. We are all in this battle of life together. Let us leave no brother or sister behind. As it says in the well-known song, "We will work with each other, we will work side by side. And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride. And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love."

Prayer: "Almighty and most gracious God and Father, we implore You to turn the hearts of all who have forsaken the faith once delivered to Your Church, especially those who have wandered from it or are in doubt through the corruption of Your truth. Mercifully visit and restore them that in gladness of heart they may take pleasure in Your Word and be made wise to salvation through faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- LSB, "Prayer for the return of the wayward and erring," pg. 306.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Micah Brown

Friday, May 20, 2022

Read 2 Thess 3:16

The Lord of Peace Himself

At the end of this short letter, we have Paul's benediction to the Thessalonian church. Each of Paul's benedictions are slightly different and here we have a unique focus on peace. The word "peace" has a long and rich history of meaning in the Scriptures. In Hebrew, the word is "Shalom" from the verbal root which means to be whole or full. Biblical peace has an idea of everything being fulfilled, everything being whole as it is meant to be. Peace means that all is right. We might have in mind the Garden of Eden before the Fall when everything was going just as God planned it to go. When folks in the Bible wished one another peace (and even today in the Middle East where the common greeting is "Shalom Aleykim" "Peace be with you") they were ultimately wishing for another person that they would have Edenic wholeness. So even in Paul's day, this understanding was still around. Paul wishes to the Thessalonians that they would have restoration to the way creation was meant to be.

Now, this is all quite lovely to know, but there is more. As one professor at the seminary is fond of saying "here's where the other shoe drops." In Micah 5:4 (the prophecy about the coming Messiah) and Paul's quotation thereof in Ephesians 2:14, the Scriptures teach us that *Christ Himself is our peace*. In Jesus Christ we have full and complete restoration to God's original plan for us. Christ gives us peace by undoing the corruption of the Fall which is the cause of all of our sin and suffering. The Fall has introduced turmoil into our lives and Christ has reversed all of this turmoil. With Him, we have perfect peace and there is nothing to disturb us anymore. If the Lord is with us, just as the Lord was with Adam and Eve in the garden, then we are restored even better than we were before. We have peace, we have fullness, and we have life.

Prayer: Lord of peace, you have restored us in Christ and given us perfect peace. Keep us in this peace in Christ until all things are fulfilled and we see this peace in its fullness. Amen.

Today's Devotion was written by Seminarian Case Farney

Saturday, May 21, 2022

Read [2 Thess 3:17-18](#)

“Signature”

“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

Once again, Paul closes another of his letters with his characteristic flourish, “Paul”. As he himself said, he did this because they knew him and could be sure this wasn’t a forgery, written by someone else trying to mislead them. Maybe he didn’t like to write, maybe his handwriting was atrocious, maybe he had other reasons for not handwriting all of his letters himself. But he made a point of putting this identifiable mark at the end of his letters.

I don’t know if they had handwriting experts in those days, but his readers must have been reassured by seeing that “Paul” at the end. They knew him, and they knew his life and the Gospel message he’d brought them. So, knowing with certainty the source of this epistle, they were confident in the Hope it brought.

But there’s another signature, there at the end of Paul’s letter, that gives even greater confidence: “Grace”. He closed with, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”** You don’t hear the word “grace” very much in ordinary conversation. You might hear that a dancer has “graceful movements”, or that a musician plays the violin “gracefully”. But, when the IRS sends you your refund, “grace” is nowhere in their letter. When two kids get into a fight over the best seat on the bus, “grace” isn’t a word they shout at each other.

I’ve never counted, but I’d be surprised if that unusual word doesn’t ring out in every single worship service, even when “Amazing Grace” isn’t sung. The world around us knows words of law, of regulation, of force. “You must do this”; “you shall not do that” is all over the federal code. But Jesus changed that: **“the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”**

The Thessalonians were absolutely certain that this was Paul’s writing, because he’d told them about God’s grace, which only comes through knowing Jesus. When someone tells you, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,”** that’s a certainty; that’s God’s signature.

Prayer: Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see! Amen.

Today’s Devotion was written by Pastor Jeff Nelson