

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost [Ord 31]  
05-11-2023  
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

- Joshua 3: 7-17                      Joshua leads the Israelites, the ark allows them to cross the Jordan on dry ground.
- Psalms 107: 1-7, 33-37          Give thanks to the Lord, God delivers those who cry out, The Israelites found a place to settle.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:5-13          Paul encouraged because they are continuing in the Faith.
- Matthew 23: 1-12                  Do not do what the Pharisees do, instead humble yourselves.

Introduction

Today we will continue working through Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

In chapter three we will look at how Paul was so concerned about the fate of the new church in Thessalonica, that he sent his helper Timothy to see what had happened in the life of the church, and to assist them with teaching. And we also hear how Paul rejoices in the report from Timothy, that they have stood firm in the faith. At the end of chapter three we hear how Paul continues to pray for the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

Let us begin with verse 5:-

<sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain.

From this verse and also verses one to four, we can see how concerned Paul was for the Christian faith Community that he had established, but had to leave quite quickly.

Paul is like a parent caring for their child. Who among you today are parents? Can you remember when your children first started to go out at night by themselves? Did you wait up for them? I know Leeza always did with our daughter.

In many places in the bible we are told not to worry, and this is generally good advice. We should not allow ourselves to be consumed by unnecessary worry, especially when things may be beyond our control, but if we have specific responsibilities, it is right for us to be concerned, and to take our responsibilities seriously. Just as parents have responsibilities for their children, which come from love and not necessarily duty, so too was Paul's concern for the Thessalonians.

We need to find the balance in our lives, in not worrying about every little thing unnecessarily, but also in taking seriously things that we have responsibilities for.

At a young age I was introduced to the “Serenity Prayer”, as a copy was stuck to the front of my mother’s bible. It goes like this:-

God grant me,  
The Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The Courage to change the things I can,  
And, the Wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

It can be a real help in discerning the things we should be concerned about, and the things we should be putting effort into in our lives.

Paul rightly felt concern for the Thessalonians, as he had introduced them to the Gospel, but he could not get to them in person, so he did the next best thing and sent Timothy to be with them.

Paul also knew the reality of the devil, and how Satan can work against those who have decided to put their trust in Jesus. In this verse Paul mentions his concerns about the “tempter”, drawing the Thessalonians away from the faith. We need to be mindful of what may be drawing us away from seeking to follow Jesus in our lives. We need to find ways to protect our faith, so that we can be shielded from distractions that may take us away from following Jesus.

Just as Paul prioritized the wellbeing of the faith of the Thessalonians, we need to be conscious of protecting not only our own faith journey, but also of those who we should be caring about and helping in their faith journey. We need to think about how we too, can encourage others in the faith.

### 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Let us now look at verses 6 to 10:-

<sup>6</sup> But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us—just as we long to see you. <sup>7</sup> For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup> For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? <sup>10</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

In these verses we hear how Paul is encouraged, by the good news about the Thessalonians, that he has received from Timothy. The Thessalonians had resisted temptations and challenges and had remained faithful in following Jesus.

How do you respond to good news?

How relieved Paul must have felt, when Timothy returned to share of how the Thessalonians were continuing in the faith. Whilst the vastness of the Roman empire facilitated travel and commerce, it was still not easy, to get news quickly, 2000 years ago. Paul couldn't give them a phone call, or text, or email, like we can today. So, waiting for news must have been hard, and to receive good news would have been such a relief.

Paul even says that it is the faith of the Thessalonians that is encouraging him.

There is such a sense of friendship and comradery in the way Paul is sharing with the Thessalonians. The knowledge that they had continued in the faith, clearly gave him great joy.

When I have been asked about the best thing I do in Christian ministry, it is clearly seeing others come to faith in Jesus.

I would like to share with you a couple of stories from my life.

One is of a young man I met when he was only a child at my previous parish. His mother and father were members of the congregation, but as he became older, he stopped coming to church with them. Then as an older teenager he came and did the Alpha Course with his mother. He got a trade and then became a pilot and moved away from his parents. I haven't spoken to him for about a year now, so I trust he's going ok, as he was when we last spoke, but a couple of years before that we were talking a bit on the phone about how he was struggling with his faith, but also about how he was continuing to persevere in reading the Bible and seeking God's guidance in his life.

Another is a lady I baptised in her fifties. She had been very loosely affiliated with the parish I was at. Her husband had historical links, her children had been baptised as infants, but she never was. She was a grandmother in a very typical Australian family. She had just received a cancer diagnosis, and wanted to talk to me about it. We had a number of conversations about life and death, about who Jesus was, and about the hope of the Christian faith. She decided that she wanted to accept Jesus into her life in a real and meaningful way. I baptised her and then a couple of months later I conducted her funeral. It was a hard funeral to take, but the knowledge of her faith, gave the service a very real sense of hope in the face of tragedy.

Being used by God to help others come to faith in Jesus is a powerful thing. It encouraged Paul and it can encourage us in our faith Journey.

Just as the message of Jesus is "Good News". When people come to faith in Jesus it is "Good News." As Christians we should be helping others to come to faith in Jesus and we should be encouraging others to stay committed to their faith in Jesus.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Let us now look at verses 11 to 13:-

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. <sup>13</sup> And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Paul concludes this chapter with a prayer for the Thessalonians. Firstly, that they would grow in their love for one another, and secondly, that they would grow in holiness. He is not saying that there is anything deficient in their faith now, but he wanted the best for them. He wanted them to grow in their faith.

Do we want the best for ourselves? Do we want the best for those we love? Do we want the best for our fellow Christians?

As Christians we should be aspiring to grow. Whilst our relationship with God is different to relationships we have with other people, we can draw some parallels. Relationships are not static things. They change, they can grow stronger, and they can decline. Just as human relationships can grow and strengthen, so can our relationship with God. So, we hear Paul praying for the best for the Thessalonians.

It is only natural that we want the best for our lives, and as Paul is pointing out to the Thessalonians the best thing for their lives is knowing God through Jesus.

### Conclusion

Today we have heard of the joy Paul felt when he heard the Thessalonians had remained firm in their faith and love. Despite the difficulties, persecution, and challenges they faced, they remained committed, and their faith was an encouragement to others.

I pray that we also will be encouraged in our faith. And I pray that we also may experience the joy of sharing our faith with others and seeing them grow in the faith. Amen.