



Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
November 10, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

† “May our Lord, Jesus Christ, and God, our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort our hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.” Amen.

These powerful words end the passage we heard from Paul’s Second Letter to the Church in Thessalonica. The previous verses of the passage point to the ‘end time’, the time when Paul firmly believed that Jesus would come again sooner than later. We refer to that coming again as the ‘Second Coming’, the first being the birth of Jesus. By the way, we will celebrate that day in just forty-five days!

Paul’s language is strong and includes “Let no one deceive you in any way”. Paul means to ‘search for the truth’, to not be led down a path by anyone or anything false and to set sights on the ultimate truth which is Jesus Christ.

Today, it appears to be more and more difficult to hear truth and to not be deceived by false statements and hearts hardened toward others. Those things are the very antithesis of what it means to follow Jesus.

Paul’s love for Jesus and his message of love were fueled by the fire of the Spirit. The Spirit inspired Paul’s numerous letters to new faith communities and compelled him to travel over 10,000 miles on foot and by boat. (<https://www.biblicaltourguide.com/travelinginstpaulstime.html>). The letters to the Thessalonians are some of the earliest known written resources of the Christian Tradition written between the years 49-52.

From the moment of Paul’s radical conversion to Jesus “found in several places in the New Testament, the Christian Scriptures (Acts 9:1–19; 22:3–13; 26:12–18; and 1 Corinthians 15:9), Paul began preaching about Jesus (Acts 9:20–21). Over the next several years, Paul traveled extensively, planting churches wherever he went. When not with those churches, he still carried the responsibility for them in his heart, like a father for his children (1 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:11)... It is traditionally believed that Paul wrote thirteen letters which are included in Christian Scriptures. (See: www.gotquestions.org/how-many-books-did-Paul-write.html; Some scholars believe that Paul only wrote seven of thirteen letters attributed to him. See: www.crossexamined.org)

The passage from today’s second reading is one such letter. It is an early letter of Paul which was challenging and focused attention on living a life in accord with the Good News of Jesus. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians and encourages us to not be led astray and to remain focused on following Jesus.

Today’s Gospel is another example of remaining focused on what is important. The passage isn’t really a story of a woman who had seven husbands. Jesus uses the story to illustrate that what is important is the resurrection, not just his resurrection, but the resurrection of all people in to eternal life.

We believe that the goal of the spiritual life is to live according to the way of love which Jesus demonstrated in life. As his followers, we are called to live life so that we and those around us can experience a glimpse of resurrection joy. Admittedly, that may not be an easy concept to grasp. I doubt the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection, bought it. A question for us today is “Do we believe in the resurrection, and if so, then what?”

Do we believe the words of the Nicene Creed that call us to resurrection and life with God in eternity? If we do, then, how ought we live our lives in response to our love for God and the goal to live as resurrection people?

How can we bring about God's reign, God's love, justice and mercy, the way of life in Jesus? What can we do to help end lying, racism, bullying, hatefulness and spite which seem all too prevalent in today's world?

As Church, we exist as followers of Jesus to bring about the reign of God, the love of God in Jesus. The Church exists to help us focus our lives on being in relationship with God. Sometimes, that is easy, and other times, it is not. Sometimes, we get it right. At other times, our human frailty gets in the way.

I can truthfully attest that there are times in which my human frailty gets the better of me, and I make mistakes in judgment. Perhaps, you experience those times as well. Yet, are we not here today to do all we can to be who God calls us to be as faithful witnesses of Jesus? Are we not called to be authentic stewards of his way of love?

Shining Our Light, the focus of our Stewardship Season, calls us to give of ourselves in witness to Jesus. On this 'Commitment Sunday', we joyfully anticipate that many pledges will be made today and pray that many more will come in over the next several weeks. We are grateful for the pledges which were received this past week, and we ask for your help to support the relationship we have with Jesus and with one another.

Jesus called Paul into a faithful relationship with him. Jesus calls each of us into relationship and calls St. Mark's into relationship as God's mission in Grand Rapids. It is a relationship of partnership with God, for we are called to be the heart and hands of God in our life and ministry together.

On one level, we celebrate that call, that mission and that partnership today. Today and during the weeks to come, we commit financial resources to the work of the Parish in 2020.

A week ago, I reflected on how much I spend on such things as my Comcast Xfinity bill, condo association fees, car payments or insurance premiums. In a subsequent conversation, I realized that some monthly expenses are essentially mandatory which I pay through automatic debit. I do that as well with my pledge. Twice a month, a specific amount automatically disappears from my bank account, joyful payments of giving for which I am grateful.

I wonder what Jesus and what Paul would say about 'giving' today. Both men gave and gave of themselves. Ultimately, they gave their lives for what they believed, taught and preached.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to believe in the Good News of Jesus. That Good News calls us to teach, preach, tend the sick, the elderly and the dying, to feed those who hunger and thirst for justice sake and to work to spiritually form Christians of all ages. We work to respond to that call as best we can here at St. Mark's.

Here, we share with others from the abundance of the many gifts given to us by God. Here, we join together in unity of heart to be comforted and strengthened for the journey of life. Here, we can experience life through the power of the Spirit and then are sent forth to help make the world a better place in which to live. Amen.