

## A Labor of Love

**St. Mark Lutheran**  
**Three services**

**Pastor Ken Welsh**  
**Oct. 22, 2017**

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*Grace to you and peace.*

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned from God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10*

Today, marks the end of our stewardship emphasis this month. Today, may also mark the beginning of stewardship emphasis for some. If so, God be praised.

I'd like to summarize the message this morning before it is even given. The message is about God calling his church to serve him and spread the Gospel. It is about the fact that God wants us to BE the church, not just attend church.

It is based first on Paul's message to the church at Thessalonica. The Apostle Paul was the missionary who started the church in Thessalonica. You can read about how that church was started by looking at Acts 17:1-4. The early church set a good example. With God's help, we hope to learn something from that example.

We are going to focus on four things from our epistle reading this morning. They are important factors in having a healthy Christian congregation. The first one is they received God's Word. They believed what Paul was telling them about our Lord Jesus Christ. Now don't take this for granted, and don't underestimate its importance.

The Holy Scriptures instruct us that God's Word has the Holy Spirit behind it. God's Word brings about repentance and the spiritual rebirth of an individual. God's Word helps a Christian grow and become spiritually stronger. God's Word guides us as to what kind of a life God wants his people to lead. Regular exposure to God's Word reminds us of some things that we as sinners tend to forget.

Paul first preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica, and the Book of Acts tells us that some of the Jews believed what they heard from him and joined the group, as did a number of God-fearing Greeks. Wasn't that wonderful?

Well, not everybody thought so. Acts 17 tells us that some of the Jews were jealous of Paul's success. They rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob, and proceeded to start a riot in the city. Those escorting Paul were concerned and hustled Paul and Silas out of Thessalonica and into the city of Berea. In Berea, Paul preached in the synagogue there and the Bereans examined the Scriptures every day to understand what Paul was saying. Many Jews believed and also many Greek women and men. But the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching there and responded by coming over to make trouble for him in Berea also. Those escorting him took him to Athens, but they left Silas and Timothy to do ministry in Berea, and the church at Thessalonica survived its affliction by holding on tightly to the Word of God. They were imitators of the Lord and of Paul and were an example to all.

The second point is that they turned away from idols. We read in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, "For they themselves report ...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." They gave up their old idols. They surrendered their lives to Jesus. They became followers of Jesus. Now in this particular case the idols were probably false or unknown gods. But idols are not only religious deities, but anything in your life that is more important than God. It is interesting to note that one of the signs of the last days will be people who are "...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." There are also other idols to watch out for: wealth, popularity, your work, even yourself. If something is more important than the true God, you need to make some adjustments in your life, by either eliminating it or dropping it to its proper place.

I would like us to pay particular attention this morning to the end of 1 Thessalonians 9: they served the living and true God. This is our third ingredient for a healthy church and a healthy Christian. The word "serving" implies you are doing something for the true and living God. You are to serve God and live your life in a way that pleases him. Jesus speaks to us in John 12:26, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. " You see, following Jesus and serving God go hand in hand. The Apostle Peter informs us in 1 Peter 4:10, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

A list of different ways to serve God has been provided in your service folder the past several weeks. If you are a new member or someone who has not been involved, this list should give you ideas on ways in which you may serve. There are spare copies on the table by the main entrance. If you missed this, pick one up, fill it out, and give it to one of the pastors or the church secretary. They may also be mailed in. The financial giving section will be treated as confidential.

That brings us to our fourth ingredient for a healthy church. The church at Thessalonica, despite the opposition, shared the faith. Paul writes in chapter one, verse eight, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything." This is something we can do on a church basis, but also on an individual basis.

Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

Our Savior Jesus Christ speaks to us in Matthew 10:32, "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven."

The people of Thessalonica actively shared their faith. They shared the good news about Jesus Christ wherever they went. They had received God's Word, and it changed their lives. It set them free. And they shared that good news with anyone who would listen. When they served God by helping others, they also shared their faith with anyone who would listen. A healthy church is filled with people who are not ashamed or afraid to share their faith.

Have you ever seen a basketball game? They have a lot of team huddles on the sideline, don't they? Meeting together as a church each week is sort of like that. We get together each Sunday and we talk about what needs to be done. We get encouragement. We get motivation from God's Word. We get advice and support. But a basketball team can't win the game in the huddle, can they? They have to go back on the floor and battle to win the game.

That's so in the church also. Church is our huddle. But we leave here to go out and battle in the game of life. There will be winners and losers there, too. It might seem like all the world is against you, but don't be afraid. God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) The victory over all that is wrong has already been won for those who believe in Jesus. So we use the gifts we have and bless others with them so that they might come to share in this victory also. It is "a labor of love". We love him because he first loved us. The world needs to hear about Jesus Christ, and it is our responsibility to make sure that happens. May God guide and bless you as you leave here today and go to serve the Lord. Amen.