

AT THE
FOOT
OF THE
CROSS

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS
‘STANDING FIRM IN THE LORD’

DIOCESE OF WEST MALAYSIA

Archdeacon Eddie Ong
(Editor)

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LENT 2021

What is Lent?

The word 'Lent' originates from the Latin word 'quadragesima' or Greek 'tessarakoste' which is the 'fortieth' day before Easter. In old English, Lent simply is springtime (or 'lenz' in German and 'lente' in Dutch). In the early years of the Church it was confined to a few days before Easter. But by the Fourth Century it was extended to forty days before Easter, a period associated with the forty days and nights that Jesus spent fasting in the desert just after his baptism. Lent is still observed for this duration today.

When is Lent?

Ash Wednesday heralds the start of the season of Lent. There are six Sundays in Lent, all of which are distinguished as celebrations of the Resurrection on which Christians feast. Six days are added to complete the original forty days of the season.

Why Lent?

The main purpose of Lent is to enrich our awareness of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the individual letters, "L, E, N, T" will assist us in appreciating the significance of his mission.

Listening & Learning

Lent is primarily about our walk with the Lord – to listen, to learn, to obey and to be encouraged by his holy Word. For 2021, our Lenten reflection is taken from 1 & 2 Thessalonians. These two epistles were written by the Apostle Paul to the new Church in Thessalonica around 51-52 A.D. They were written to urge the believers to stand firm in the Lord despite troubles, trials and tribulations. There are altogether 47 daily devotions in this booklet, 42 of which will focus on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and the other five devotions on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter. May God the Holy Spirit, our divine Teacher and Counsellor, bless you as you reflect on this year's Lenten devotional articles.

Examination

Lent is a contemplative preparation for seeking spiritual renewal. “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial.” (*Liturgy of Ash Wednesday - Book of Common Prayer*)

Needs

In a time of a great disruption caused by the ongoing and unwelcomed Covid-19 pandemic, Lent is an appropriate season to express Christian compassion-in-action in response to Divine love. Years ago, the Diocese advocated “Lenten Jars” and we placed coins and notes we saved from meals and put them into these jars. At the end of the season, we gave the total collection from the congregation to charity. What is important about Lent is not so much the jars, but the cultivation of compassionate hearts, not just for a season, but throughout our lives.

Thanksgiving

Lent is also a time of Thanksgiving. First, and above all, our Thanks to the Lord for the blessings of belonging to him. If not for his grace, there will be no conversion, no abundant life, no forgiveness of sins, no peace and no eternal life. “Thank you, Lord for your incomparable love, goodness and steadfast mercy.”

I wish to express my gratitude to all the writers of this Lenten meditation. Many of the writers have been writing devotions annually from the time I was given the responsibility to produce, “*At the Foot of the Cross*” in 2013. They wrote devotions after devotions with gracious dedication. Out of their hearts of love for God, they shared their rich and edifying experiences. I wish to mention my deep appreciation to Bishop Moon Hing, whose support for the project is unquestionable.

Finally, let me express my thanks to a team of volunteers who helped edit these yearly Lenten devotions. They are Edward Clayton, Esther Richards, Janet Kandalis, Judi Cheah, Philia Hatia, Deaconess Ruth, Satkunamary Gnanakkan and the Reverend Dr. Vijendra Daniel. “Thank you,” dear editing team!”

Eddie Ong

YOU BELONG TO GOD

“Paul, Silas and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God
the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:1)

Written by the Apostle Paul, and on behalf of his missionary assistants Silas and Timothy, the opening verse of 1 Thessalonians 1:1 gives us hope in the midst of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. This epistle was written to encourage the brethren to stay firm. Despite adversities, persecution and rejection, Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians that they had an immensely powerful and invisible ally supporting, sustaining and safeguarding them, and this invincible ally was none other than ‘*God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*’ (v.1). Men may reject them, but not God!

Paul helped them to understand that their spiritual status is now ‘*in*’ God (NIV) and that they ‘*belong to God*’ (NLT) through Jesus (v.1). This knowledge is significant. Those who belong to God are loved by God. They are precious in his sight for they are his chosen people. They are given his promised goodness, grace and mercy. Their lives, livelihood and future are in the mighty hands of their God and he looks after what is his!

To belong to God however does not mean that they will not undergo troubles, tribulations and trials. Paul who was personally called by God to Macedonia, had, himself, to face many afflictions, agonies and adversities (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). However, in the midst of all these trials, troubles, tribulations and even death, the Lord God stays with his chosen ones and walks us through the fire, the flood and the plagues. We are his. He has adopted us as his children and has saved us through the precious blood of Christ at Calvary. He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit that we may call God, “Abba Father.” He promised us that he will never leave nor forsake us; nor will he ever issue us a “get-out clause” for we belong to him eternally.

The knowledge that we always belong to God is comforting. Through this knowledge of belonging, we will experience his 'grace and peace' (v.1); even as we are surrounded by many anxieties and an unwelcomed pandemic.

Ponder

As we begin Lent, let us reflect on the goodness and mercy of God, and our response to him. While God has taken great trouble, sacrifices and loving efforts to receive you as his own, how have you responded to him in this season of your life? Are you eternally grateful to him or are you taking your Lord for granted? Are you truly worshipping him daily? Is there an awareness in you that the Lord is present in your home and wanting to hear your concerns of the day? Are you listening to him through his Scripture, the daily Word of God or are you doing your own thing without even chatting with him in prayer?

Promise

"I will see the goodness of God in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord." (Psalm 27:13-14)

Prayer

"Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever." (Collect for Ash Wednesday)



Article by the Venerable Eddie Ong, Vicar-General of the Diocese (November 2020 to January 2021) and Archdeacon of the Upper Central Archdeaconry. Eddie is also the Vicar of St Gabriel's Church, Kuala Lumpur since 2010.

February 18, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

FAITH, LOVE AND HOPE

“We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Do you sometimes feel burdened and heavy-laden by the work that the Lord has called you to? Instead of hopeful, you may be feeling hopeless; and instead of faith, you may be feeling fear. In this letter, St Paul writes to a community of believers who could probably relate to the emotions that you may be feeling. The Christians in Thessalonica were at the time facing persecution. Paul, impressed by their faithfulness, affirmed them for their work produced by faith, labour prompted by love, and endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ.

While we may not face the same type of challenges as the church in Thessalonica, we can take comfort in Paul’s timeless words of encouragement in these verses today.

Firstly, we can have faith in a God who is always faithful, even when we lack faith. God’s character is consistent, and his promises are true. As we put our faith in God, we can know that our foundation in him is secure. What we believe informs how we behave. And as we continue to put our trust in him, he can transform our beliefs so that we begin to see ourselves the way he sees us.

Secondly, we can continue to labour in love as the Spirit enables us. Paul uses the word ‘labour’ to describe the work of love, suggesting that there is a kind of exhaustion, toil, or even brokenness that comes when you love someone deeply. You may feel broken by the events of the world, or the pain of a loved one. But the mystery of God’s kingdom is that God can do more with broken hearts than with mighty hands. Psalm 34 reminds us that the Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. We can know this love and share it with others today.

Finally, we can remain steadfast as we persevere with hope. As we look towards Easter Sunday, we have the assurance that Jesus won over death. And because we have seen victory in the future, we do not need to worry. Without hope, pain and suffering might feel like the end. With hope, suffering is only a comma to the sentence; it doesn't have the final word. As we ground ourselves in the hope of the resurrection, we can take comfort that in Christ we have the victory. As we fix our focus on Jesus, we can continue to follow him, to run the race marked out for us, and to be transformed more and more into his likeness.

Ponder

How can I have a faith that empowers me for today, a hope that strengthens me for tomorrow, and a love that makes it more than me?

Promise

Psalm 34:18 promises us that "the Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit".

Prayer

Jesus, I thank you that through your death and resurrection on the cross we can have victory. Holy Spirit, would you empower me today to live a victorious life. Please sustain me with enduring hope, so that I can share the love of Christ with those around me. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by Deaconess Jacintha Cheah of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Jacintha is married to the Reverend Abel, and together, they serve as the 5pm service pastors.

February 19, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 1:4-7

CHOSEN BY GOD

“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so, you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:4-7)

Verse 4: God loves you very much and has chosen you even before the foundation of the world. He brought you into his family, alongside brothers and sisters and called you his own. This is entirely his doing and an expression of his pure love for you. Paul provided the reason for our confidence in God. It's because he made the first move towards us and has been on our side ever since. The Godhead—Father, Son and Spirit, are all actively involved in our salvation and sanctification. We have been adopted to sonship and nothing can separate us from his great love.

Verse 5: The Thessalonians' conversion was genuine because the effect was evident in their lives. The gospel was believed, lived out and proclaimed with power. The source of that power was the Holy Spirit. True repentance comes from the Spirit, who in turn transforms us towards Christlikeness. Human persuasion will never produce the fruit of divine truth. Likewise, God intends to grow you to be more like his Son. He convicts your heart and empowers the change. This supernatural work of regeneration is not your effort but the Holy Spirit, whose very presence reaffirms your calling.

Verse 5b: Paul's life reflected gospel consistency. Now examine your own. Do you see yourself as lord or servant of all? Do you do as you preached? Do you live for your own, or the sake of others?

Verse 6: The church faithfully followed the way of the Apostles and in turn, of Christ. This included enduring the persecution that came because they believed the gospel. Yet, they did so with joy given by the Holy Spirit, another evidence of God's calling in them. Therefore, consider it pure joy when you too, face trials of many kinds. For it has been granted to us on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for

him. Indeed, all who desire to live godly lives will be persecuted. But rejoice because the suffering will prove the genuineness of your faith; like gold purified through fire, so it may be found to result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus returns. Our present suffering becomes bearable when it is understood in anticipation of our future secured hope.

Verse 7: The Thessalonians' faith became exemplary, testifying to their election and the transforming power of the gospel. Equally, your life must display a pattern of continuous change as you grow in grace. Your conduct must befit your status, your fruit in keeping with repentance. You are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you first received.

Ponder

"We glory in sufferings, knowing they produce perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Hope doesn't put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)

Promise

"And those whom he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:30)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, though at times my life is painful and unbearable, I can have deep joy powered by your Spirit. For you chose me and you are for me. What matters is who I am in you. Make my life a model to others, so that I may be a witness of your power and glory. Amen.



Article by Ms. Lee Sue Yee, the Regional Network Director of Christianity Explored. She is a member of the Diocesan Synod and sits on the Diocesan Ordination Interview Board. She worships at St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

February 20, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

A MODEL FOR ALL BELIEVERS

“The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to 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 rescues us from the coming wrath.”
(1 Thessalonians 1:8-10)

Having good and inspirational models to follow is essential for effective Christian living. Lack of exemplary models will lead to stagnation of Christian growth and witness. This passage gives us a clear picture of what a good model looks like and the lessons we can learn.

There are three actions taken by the Thessalonian Christians that would qualify them to become model believers. Firstly, the message was received with the joy given by the Holy Spirit despite severe suffering (v.6). Persecutions did not stop the joy and gospel reaching them. They followed the footsteps of Jesus Christ who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame (Hebrews 12:2).

Secondly, the message rang out from them not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but their faith in God was known everywhere (v.8). The gospel which came to them with words and deep conviction by the Holy Spirit, was too good to be kept to themselves. They shared their faith all over the country. This was also aided by the strategic location of the busy seaport of Thessalonica, being at the junction of the great Egnatian Highway.

Thirdly, the message resulted in transformation when they put their faith in Jesus. They turned to God from idols, they began to serve the living and true God and they waited for the return of the risen Jesus from heaven (v.9b-10).

The believers in Thessalonica became imitators of Paul and of the Lord Jesus Christ (v.6a) resulting in them being commended by Paul as a model for all believers. The actions seen in the lives of these believers are a great challenge to us. The love of self has made it difficult to have joy during suffering. We need to die to self and surrender fully to God so that we can suffer for his sake.

Sharing the gospel must be a normal part of the everyday lives of the Thessalonian Christians, resulting in the widespread transmission of God's message. May we live out our lives as a good testimony, practice what we preach and faithfully and regularly share the gospel with love and tact to unbelievers around us.

Ponder

Are our lives being transformed when we became a Christian? Is there a turning to God from modern day idols which are anything that displaces God as the number one priority in our lives? Are we using our time, talents and treasures serving the living and true God as the Thessalonians did? Their labour was prompted by love (v.3b). May the love of and for God and the Holy Spirit's power move us out of our complacency and self-centredness to effective Christian ministry.

Are we looking expectantly for the Lord's return and living as pilgrims and aliens in this world (1 Peter 2:11) or are we so entrenched here on earth that we live only for the temporal? The Thessalonians looked forward and placed their hope in the return of the Lord and thus were able to endure all the persecutions. May their example inspire and prompt us to do likewise.

Promise

Jesus promised that we will never be alone (Matthew 28:20), the Holy Spirit will empower us to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8) and he will surely return (1 Thessalonians 4:16, John 14:3).

Prayer

Lord, we truly repent and turn to you from any modern-day idols. Anoint us with your Holy Spirit to share the gospel and serve you with endurance as we await your second coming. In Jesus' name. Amen!



Article by the Reverend Dato' Dr Yeoh Beng San, Priest at Parish of Cornerstone Sanctuary, Ipoh. Rev. Yeoh is also a medical doctor.

February 21, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

STRONG OPPOSITION

“You know, brothers and sisters that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.” (1 Thessalonians 2:1-2)

Today’s reading reminds me of an English idiom, “Once bitten, twice shy.” It refers to a person who has failed or has been hurt when trying to do something, and then becomes over cautious and, or fearful, about doing it again. Have you felt like that? Are the past wounds in ministry or church work still biting you and hindering you to continue to serve the Lord?

This is not the case with Paul. He says, “We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi” and “faced strong opposition” (v.2). Paul certainly knew that God wanted him to turn to Macedonia, and not proceed to Asia (present Turkey) as he had wanted. Here we get an insight as to why Paul was still passionate and zealous to share the gospel. In the middle of ferociously raging opposition, Paul says he was able to serve because he had God’s help. Just because he obeyed God did not mean things were easy for him.

Often obedience to God is taken to mean that the road ahead will be easier. When faced with strong opposition, there is always a temptation to be disappointed with God. An underlying assumption is that God will make the mission easier because we obeyed him. It is his responsibility to remove the obstacles and opposition. The passage today makes it clear that this is not the case. God enabled Paul to stand firm in the Lord amidst strong opposition.

I am persuaded to believe that Paul was able to stand firm because of his personal experiences and encounter with Jesus Christ. Jesus did not give up on him, even though Paul was so persistently determined to exterminate Christianity. Out of this reservoir of experiences with God’s grace, Paul could love the lost, as God loves him, no matter the cost to him.

Ponder

When was the last time you stood firm in the Lord in spite of strong opposition?

When was the last time you gave in to strong opposition?

Promise

‘... with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.’ (1 Thessalonians 2:2)

Prayer

Almighty God, help me to stand firm in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and national upheavals. Help me to continue to serve you no matter the cost. As you searched and called out Paul, so Heavenly Father, search me, try me, fill me once again. Grant, O Lord, your favour on me. I offer my will, self, pride and surrender them to you. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.



Article by the Right Reverend Dr D Steven Abbarow, Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia. Prior to his episcopacy, Canon Dr Abbarow was Principal-designate for Seminari Theoloji Malaysia. He is married to Anne and they have two children, Ruel and Naomi.

February 22, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5

GOD-PLEASING CONDUCT

“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness.” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-5)

We have seen so far in Paul’s letter that he is thankful to God for the Thessalonians because they exemplify faith, hope and love in Jesus despite suffering, thereby becoming an example to believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul reminds them that he and his team, too, had suffered conflict as they preached the gospel in Philippi.

Then, in verses 3-5, the focus of our devotion today, Paul asserts that their bravery in preaching the gospel is because they have been entrusted with it; it is not a message they made up, it is not for selfish gain, nor is it to deceive the Thessalonians into believing something that is not true. And Paul is confident that God is their witness to the intentions of their hearts as he affirms that they did not approach the Thessalonians with flattery, nor for monetary gain.

In these verses, Paul models how we are to conduct our ministry. If we are leaders of a ministry, how do we conduct ourselves? If we have leaders to submit to in ministry, how do we conduct ourselves?

The gospel that Paul, and us in our ministries, bring to others is that we have sinned against a holy God, but God in his mercy saved us from his wrath by sending his Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sin so that, bearing Jesus’ righteousness, we can be reconciled to him and stand before him in heaven.

The rest of Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians underscores this truth as he reminds them how they are to live and please God as Christians and asks that they encourage each other with the hope that they will be with Jesus when he comes again (4:1-17).

Do our lives bear witness to the gospel of salvation we received? Do we lead as though we have been entrusted with the gospel? Are we more concerned with God’s glory, or our own popularity? Are we discerning of those whom we choose to be our leaders?

Are we resolved to encourage each other with the hope and future we have in Jesus Christ?

Like Paul, we know that God is our witness, so let's be faithful to the gospel work we are called to, standing firm in him to the very end.

Ponder

Haste thee on from grace to glory,
Armed by faith, and winged by prayer.
Heaven's eternal days before thee,
God's own hand shall guide us there.
Soon shall close thy earthly mission,
Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days,
Hope shall change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.

Text from "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken" by Henry Francis Lyte

Promise

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

Prayer

Thank God for giving us the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask that his Spirit always guide us in our ministries so that we may be good witnesses of the gospel to non-Christians and an encouragement to our brothers and sisters in Christ.



Article by Mrs Melissa Raj, the Chairperson of the Diocesan Youth Council. Melissa worships at St Mary's Cathedral – SMACC, Kuala Lumpur.

February 23, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:6-8

THE IMPACT OF CARING, LOVING AND SHARING

“We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” (1 Thessalonians 2:6-8)

The apostle Paul did his ministry with much passion not only in Thessalonica but wherever he went. In Acts 17:1-9 we read that in Thessalonica, Paul together with Silas shared the gospel in the midst of jealous Jews who tried to hinder their ministry. They were given maximum trouble. They were even accused of defying Caesar's decrees because they had said that there was another king called Jesus. But they were not discouraged. Paul was focused in seeing the transformation of the Thessalonians as he shared the gospel of salvation with them.

As he ministered to the Thessalonians, Paul did not flatter them, did not seek their praise, and never became a burden to them. In fact, he supported himself as a tent maker (Acts 18:3). He and Silas had only one goal, that is to see the Thessalonians become disciples of the Lord. Years later, he was able to tell them how gentle he was among them. This gentleness was love in action. It was the highest example of unconditional love which is pleasing in God's sight. Paul further described his love for them like the love a caring mother has for her little children. In fact, he was able to express that it was the love he and Silas had for them that made them share with the Thessalonians not only the Gospel but their lives as well because they had become so dear to them. The impact of this love, caring and sharing with the power of the Holy Spirit strengthened the church in Thessalonica and made it stand firm even after Paul and Silas moved on.

Paul set an example for those in the Lord's ministry. Years ago, when I was a teenager, I was able to see my Priests who were mostly missionaries serving like Paul as they loved and cared for their congregation. Today, as I serve the Lord, their examples are always in my mind. My prayer for all of us is that our service for the Lord will be one of

caring, loving and sharing so that the Lord's name will be glorified in the lives of those we minister to.

Ponder

Effective gospel sharing depends on how we live and act! Are we willing to know the secret of winning others, loving, and caring for them? Look to Jesus!

Promise

"The One who calls you is faithful and he will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Prayer

Lord, empower me that I may become your faithful servant and do your will in caring for those entrusted to me. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by Pastor Nesam Ebenezer of St. Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya. Nesam is also the Chairperson of St. Paul's Day Training Centre (DTC), a ministry to people with learning difficulties.

February 24, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

WITNESSING WITH GODLY VIRTUES

“Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:9-10)

It's always God's plan for us that we must use our time, resources and career to bring others into God's kingdom but, invariably, such endeavours entail much “toil and hardship” (v.9). However, the apostle Paul was no stranger to “toil and hardship”. With three successive, successful missionary journeys to his credit, he had travelled many long, hard miles, aggressively preaching Christ across the world. In a gripping account, Paul recounts his grizzly experiences: shipwreck, imprisonment, flogging, stoning, beatings, exhaustion and hunger (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), resulting from his unrelenting witnessing for the Lord.

In verse 10, Paul tells the Thessalonians the kind of person he was – “holy, righteous and blameless”. These are character traits that are attributed only to God the Father and his Son, our Lord Jesus. However, in describing himself as “holy, righteous and blameless,” (v.10) Paul was certainly not claiming equality with God but, rather pointing to the godly virtues every teacher or mentor must have before preaching the gospel to others. Basically, Paul was reminding the Thessalonians of what he had told the Corinthians so that they may be saved, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul had already become a person fully transformed on the inside ever since his personal encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:4-5), in a threefold way. Firstly, he was called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to reflect God's character as demanded by God, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Secondly, the Holy Spirit had worked in Paul's heart so that he could live righteously by putting off his former way of life and putting ‘on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24 cf. 1 Timothy 6:11). Thirdly, Paul had become blameless, which meant being sexually moral, pure, truthful (Revelation 14:4-5) and a receptacle for God's honour and favour (Psalm 84:11). Thus, with

holiness, righteousness, and blamelessness as his spiritual armour, Paul took the gospel to the world at large.

Not all of us are called to endure hardship to spread the gospel to distant lands, as Paul was. But each of us is responsible as a servant of God to share Christ with people in our own sphere of influence. People without a born-again personal relationship with Christ are in our workplace, in our neighbourhood, among our friends and relatives and, nay, for that matter, even in our church and our home! They need the Lord, and we have a wonderful opportunity to reach out to them with the soul-inspiring, life-transforming and destiny-changing message of Christ. Yet, we sit in silence, make lame excuses and let that opportunity slip by. Come on, people of God, let's all be motivated by Paul's undying passion for evangelism and let's not withhold the Good News from anyone any longer (Proverbs 3:27).

Ponder

What is the most severe hardship we have ever endured for the sake of saving a lost soul? Are we preparing ourselves to be "holy, righteous and blameless" so as to become a role model to prospective believers?

Promise

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you. (Mt 5:11-12).

Prayer

Lord, please lay some souls upon my heart and help me to love them, pray for them, care for them and meet their needs. Lord, please grant me the grace to nobly do my part to win these souls for you. Amen.



Article by Mr Philip Nainan, a Lay Reader at St. Christopher's Church, Johor Bahru. Philip is a lawyer.

February 25, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12

LIVING CHRISTIAN LIVES

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

Many of us have heard from family and friends, and others, that the bar of Christian living is set too high. So high, they say, that it is impossible for anyone to attain. Many Christians like ourselves must have often pondered and wondered over this same question. The bible tells us that even the great among the faithful feels this same sense of helplessness (Romans 7:18b, 24).

But however high the bar, Paul gives us in this epistle a vision of what should drive us – the Second Coming; the freedom from fear of God’s wrath and judgment (1:10b; 2:15); the bodily resurrection and glorious meeting of the faithful, both living and dead with the Lord (4:13ff; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12ff); the inheritance of salvation (5:8-9).

Earlier, he gave us some practical guidelines. Even though he could have demanded to be supported, he has chosen not to burden others, but to work hard to support himself (2:6b, 9), while pointing others to Christ; to be gentle “like a mother” and loving (2:7-8). Is the bar too high? Well, Paul described those easily achievable actions as “holy, righteous and blameless” living (2:10).

In our passage, Paul says that Christian living also means treating each other as a father would treat his beloved child. There are those among us who are blessed. But even those among us whose fathers fall, sometimes far short, nevertheless can see these same fatherly qualities in those who mentor us or in those we look up to as our role-models. Paul uses the words “encouraging, comforting and urging” to set the bar for us. To challenge and push us to greater heights in simple ways: to walk alongside each other; to weep and to rejoice together.

Here we see the complete picture of the ideal Christian family: a nurturing home in which a gentle, caring mother and a loving, caring father, each complementing and helping the other to bring about the best in their family.

The Christian family acts as one to even go over and beyond the bar.

- To hold on fast to the sure hope and certain promise in the salvation to come on the Lord's return.
- To not succumb to the tribulations and temptations of the world.
- To not fight each other over our own small agendas.
- To not dwell on our hurts, imagined or otherwise.

But rather to help each other to rise above them. Such then is to 'live lives worthy of God' (v.12) – worthy of the loving and eternal Father who has made these promises to us in his Son Jesus Christ.

And the prize over and beyond the bar? God's kingdom and glory!

Ponder

Are we easily discouraged by the seemingly insurmountable bar of Christian living?

Promise

It is God himself who calls us to his kingdom and glory in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer

Dear Father, help me to be strong and trust in you even more, the more troublesome the times. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Gordon Kong who serves at St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur. He is pastorally responsible for the 8.30am and 6.00pm liturgical services plus the Nepali outreach ministry.

THE WORD AT WORK

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Paul has previously begun thanking God for the Thessalonian Church (1:1-10) and now, after describing his team’s ministry with them, he returns to this theme of thanksgiving.

Our verse today is pregnant with theological riches that deserve careful teasing out. Here are four things to note from it:

1. **The Thessalonians received the word of God from Paul and his team.**
The ‘word of God’ here refers to the Gospel: the message of Jesus Christ - his death for our sins in our place and his resurrection which shows his Kingship (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This was the ‘word of God’ which Paul and his team faithfully preached and the Thessalonians received. And it is the same word that we are to proclaim to others.
2. **The Thessalonians accepted it not as a human word but as the word of God.** The Thessalonians believed that the Gospel which was preached to them was God’s word and they therefore obeyed it – they turned from idols to serve him and wait for the Lord Jesus to return (1 Thessalonians 1:11-12). We too are to receive the Gospel as it actually is: God’s message that comes from him and act on it.
3. **That word continued to be at work in the Thessalonians as believers.**
This was seen in their perseverance despite persecution (2:14-16), their godly living (4:1) and their mutual love (4:9). The Gospel is not just the entry point to becoming a Christian but it continues to work in believers to motivate, teach and enable us to follow Jesus throughout our Christian lives. We never ‘graduate’ from the Gospel. Every day we know we are sinners and so every day we should be thankful for Jesus who ‘rescues us from the coming wrath’

(1:10) by his death for us and every day we should live to serve him as our coming King.

4. **God was the one to be continually thanked for all this.** The Gospel is God's message and those who are chosen by him believe it only through the powerful work of his Spirit (v.1:5). So, in the end, God is the one who is glorified as the Word does its work.

Ponder

Whenever the Gospel is believed and acted on, that is evidence that God is at work. Where have you seen that in your own life and in the lives of others?

Promise

When we share the gospel, we don't have to feel under pressure to make people believe. We are to faithfully proclaim the message but it is up to God to enable them to receive it as his word.

Prayer

Pray that God would be at work in the hearts of people in your own area as his word goes out – and that it would be seen not only in initial repentance but in ongoing changing lives. We need to pray because it is only by God's Spirit that people will receive the Gospel not as a human word but as the word of God.



Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur and a member of the Provincial Synod.

February 27, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

SUFFERING FOR WHAT WE BELIEVE

“For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.” (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures that everyone has the freedom of religion and beliefs. Regrettably, many in the world today are facing discrimination, persecution and even death for their faith. Open Doors reports that one in eight believers, or 260 million people, currently face persecution worldwide. Discrimination and ill-treatment can be caused either by a tyrannical state or society under the banner of “identity-politics” and religion. There are various kinds of ill-treatment and cyber-bullying occurring because one has different beliefs or convictions contrary to popular movements that may be trending currently. In the end, freedom to belief and practice their faith, not just personally, but even publicly, is a relentless battle for many believers.

This is certainly not a new issue but has been a constant predicament for true believers from the beginning of the Church to our present age. Paul here acknowledges the oppressions that believers are facing in Thessalonica as in Judea because they have received the word of God (1 Thessalonians 1:6). The Jews or the Gentiles, depending on the context, are almost always viciously opposing those who believe in the Gospel.

What can believers do when they face persecution?

Firstly, Paul reminds believers that they are sharing the same challenges that Jesus and the prophets faced. In many other passages, even Paul identifies himself with Jesus’ suffering for the Gospel. The journey of faith is rough, but we can be assured that as Jesus overcame even death, we too will be triumphant if we remain faithful until

the end. Throughout history, where persecution increased the Church grew faster. No persecution can stop the advancement of God's Kingdom!

Secondly, Paul states that those who oppose the advancement of the Gospel are heaping up their sins and are under God's wrath. How should we respond to this? As humans, it is easier to take comfort that our enemies will be punished, and justice will be served but it is our Christian responsibility to pray for the persecutors that they may understand the love of God that is shown through Jesus.

Ponder

What should be our Christian response when we face persecution?

Promise

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Prayer

Father God, today we remember those who are persecuted for their faith and even some of us in our own context. May we find strength in the cross and through our testimonies for the Gospel, we pray that our persecutors themselves will be drawn to the truth and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Gerrad Emmanuel, Vicar of Holy Spirit Church, Ipoh. He is also a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee.

February 28, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18

SATAN BLOCKED OUR WAY

“But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.” (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18)

Paul had great plans to visit Thessalonica, but he says, ‘Satan hindered us’ (v.18). He tried many times, but there were hindrances over and over again. The believers in Thessalonica had undergone great challenges, trials and persecutions and yet they held on to the Lord. Paul wanted to visit them and personally encourage them, but the devil hindered him!

The last 30 years as a servant of God, I have faced many hindrances in the ministry, though not as much as Paul faced, yet the inner struggle and frustrations have been very painful. One of the things I had learned as a combat engineer is that, when there is an obstacle, retreat, re-strategize, pray and wait upon the Lord and then move on forward. This has seen me come thus far in my ministry.

Back in 1995, I was on my way to Mentakab, Pahang from Kota Baru, Kelantan, and some 550 km away to baptize about 45 souls. My car tire blew and 5 of us ended up in the ravine! Praise God, none of my youths were injured. It was only me, bleeding from my forehead and I had serious neck-pain. Subsequently, I had to undergo a c5-c6 surgery. I realized that the devil was not happy and wanted to stop me from bringing the souls into the Kingdom of God. My pain and blood did not stop me from continuing my journey to the 7th Ranger Camp in Mentakab. I baptized them first, only then did I go to the hospital for further treatment. I praise God for some of those whom I had baptized on that day are now serving the Lord as priests including the Reverend John Layang in our Diocese and a few others, in the Diocese of Kuching.

Beloved, obstacles and hindrances will come our way as we serve God in many forms, but if we are focused on the Lord, the Lord will see us through in life. Paul did not stop, but he persevered on, so much so he says in Philippians 3:13-14, ‘I press on...’ Paul was focused on the call he had from God and he was a successful servant of God. As

a child of God, let us not focus on the powers of the devil, but on the *power* of God. Let us be overcomers in life!

During this Lent season, let us draw close to God. May we experience God in an intimate way just like Paul who testified to a powerful and victorious Christian life, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Ponder

What are the obstacles you face in your spiritual journey? Do you think these obstacles are due to your own lack of discipline or mistake, or do you think Satan is at work to discourage you?

Promise

Stay focus on God’s mission. Persevere in Jesus’ name. It is said that the only bird that will peck at an eagle is the crow. It sits on the eagle’s back and bites its neck. The eagle does not respond nor fight with the crow. It doesn’t waste time nor energy on the crow. It simply opens its wings and begins to rise higher and higher in the sky. The higher the flight, the harder it is for the crow to breathe. Eventually, the crow falls due to the lack of oxygen. So, stop wasting time with the “crows” in your life. Just take them to the heights; to the Lord in prayer. Focus on the Lord and not on the surrounding distractions and obstacles. Draw near to God and the Devil will flee, eventually!

Prayer

O Lord, grant me the strength to persevere and overcome obstacles. Help me draw close to you daily and fulfil your perfect will in my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Article by the Venerable Jacob George John, Vicar of All Souls’ Church, Cameron Highlands and Archdeacon of the Eastern Archdeaconry.

March 1, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

OUR HOPE, OUR JOY, OUR CROWN

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Paul asked a rhetorical question, “For what is it we live for, that gives us hope and joy and is our proud reward and crown?” (v.19a LBV). I wonder what your answer is?

For Paul, his answer is not earthly comfort nor riches but Christian converts, “indeed, it is you!” i.e., unbelievers who have responded to Christ through his preaching and ministry. Leading unbelievers to Christ gave the Apostle Paul great reward and enthusiasm. And this divine reward is for all who are faithful soul-winners for Christ, and not just confined to missionaries and pastors.

The new converts to Christianity are Paul’s great joy, “Yes, you will bring us much joy” (v.19b LBV) and it will be our joy as well for every new convert we lead to Christ. The Greek word for joy “*chara*” is “gladness, cheerfulness and delight.” This cheerful and delighted joy will be multiplied when we stand with the converts before God’s throne, received graciously into ‘the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (v.19). O what state of blessedness and joy together with myriads of angels rejoicing when souls are saved; when unbelievers become believers and are ushered into the Father’s House.

Paul described the moment seeing converts received favourably in God’s presence as like receiving the “crown of rejoicing.” His crown is his converts, ‘you are our glory and joy’ (v.20). The word “crown” is the victor’s crown, the crown of leading someone to Christ. There is a victory and a divine prize given in winning people for Christ, or rather, in allowing God to win people to Christ through us.

For Paul, such a forward-looking, faith-filled anticipation, witnessing the Thessalonian Christians standing favourably before God, gave Paul great motivation and perseverance to carry out the Lord’s commission despite adversities and affliction.

Today, is the day of salvation. Today is the day that we can minister to unbelievers and direct them Christ. May we be gentle witnesses yet courageously passionate to present

the gospel message of truth and grace in Christ, and who knows; we may be standing alongside not only with our friends and but also, former foes as well, rejoicing and worshipping together in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Winning people to Christ is a fulfilling investment with an eternal reward. It makes life worthwhile. What a day of rejoicing it will be when all believers are gathered together, and what joy of reunion with our pastors, missionaries and friends standing alongside, who brought us to know Christ when we were unbelievers.

Ponder

Those we win for Christ are our hope, joy, and crown of glory. Who are the people that you have introduced to Christ? Who is the next person that you are hoping and praying to share the good message of Christ with?

Promise

Spending eternity with Christ is a great motivation for believers. This confidence will sustain you throughout trials and tribulations. We must keep eternal values in view lest we fail to see from the Lord's God's perspective on the purpose of our lives.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for the faithful Christians in my life, who shared the gospel with me, prayed for my salvation, ministered to me, and pointed me to the Lord Jesus Christ, my God, and my Saviour. I pray that I would take every opportunity to testify to the truth of the gospel to people around me. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by Deaconess Ruth Ong, Deaconess-in-charge of All Souls' International Community Church, Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur, a church God used her to plant and set-up since 2010.

March 2, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

BE STRENGTHENED AND ENCOURAGED

“So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.” (1 Thessalonians 3:1-3)

Following the Movement Control Order in March 2020, I called my target group to check on their wellbeing. They shared their plight and suffering. Some had lost their jobs, others had pay cuts, and a few had very little food for several days. Our Social Concerns Ministry immediately responded to their needs. In such a situation, I wonder, “What would Jesus do in times like this?”

Diligently follow the model of Jesus! In today’s reading, we see how the Apostle Paul responded to the struggles and suffering of the Thessalonian believers. While they did not go through a COVID-19 pandemic, the Christians in Thessalonica, nonetheless, faced ‘much suffering’ (1 Thessalonians 1:6). Paul was in a dilemma where he needed to make a choice between alleviating his own loneliness or alleviating the suffering of the Thessalonians; and he chose a godly choice. He sent his co-worker, Timothy to be with the believers rather than to have him by his personal side. The normal mindset says, “Take care of your needs first and then do charity” but not so for Paul. “So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens” (v.1). Paul faithfully followed his Master’s example by ‘not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others’ (Philippians 2:4).

Determine to address! Secondly, Paul attended to a needy situation. It was not just wishy-washy platitudes, but a holistic decision making to honour God. True compassion is action oriented. Paul wrote, “So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy” (vv.1-2a). There was a needs assessment done by Paul. His conclusion was that the Thessalonians believers needed moral support more than he did. To address their need, he sent Timothy. He chose to be a godly example by putting his needs last. “Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

Deploy apt assistance! Thirdly, Paul acted. “We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith” (v.2). He knew who to send and for what end result. He sent a situational leader who had compassion and cognisance of the situation, to achieve the anticipated outcome, “encouragement.” He sent his very best handpicked Timothy; his best choice to address the situation.

Destined to suffer! Paul’s message was tough. In today’s Christianity, many find it hard to accept that “suffering” is part of a divine calling. Jesus himself had warned us “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul wrote, “For you know quite well that we are destined for suffering” (v.3). Here we see Paul, not as a people pleaser, but as a dedicated servant of God, who is brutally honest but divinely compassionate.

Ponder

In the current trying pandemic situation, how well do you understand the Father-heart of God? Is our help and aid to the needy structured on the holistic model of Jesus or done as a mere charity? How ready and eager are we to accept the “ministry and calling of suffering”?

Promise

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 ESV)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I have been a ceremonial Christian without much action. I have forgotten that faith without action is dead! I have acted ritualistically without much involvement. Forgive, Lord! Teach me to practise your godly examples. Enable me to adhere to the model of your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



Article by Ms Jasmine Adaickalam, a member of the Diocesan Synod. She heads the Social Ministry of St James Church, Kuala Lumpur. Her passion is to restore the dignity of the disadvantaged people groups.

March 3, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 3:4-6

LONGING TO SEE YOU

“In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labours might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.”
(1 Thessalonians 3:4-6)

Paul had earlier told the Thessalonian Christians to expect suffering for the gospel, as he had suffered persecution in Philippi. Having had to leave them due to a riot, Paul was anxiously eager to know the spiritual state of the Christians in Thessalonica. Timothy, whom Paul sent to the Thessalonians to find out about their condition, had returned with a good report: the Thessalonian believers were doing remarkably well in faith, hope and love. They learned to care for each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. This news convinced Paul that Satan's plans to disrupt God's work had not been successful. Now, Paul was longing to see them and to strengthen their faith.

Trials are common for every Christian. No one is exempted, no one gets a trouble-free ride to heaven. Often, we focus intently on the details of our difficulties. But God is more concerned with how we respond than with the trial itself. While we sometimes don't have a choice about the bad things that happen to us, we do have a choice as to how we can respond: either in faith or unbelief, in humility or arrogance, in forgiveness or in anger, in hope or in despair. We must learn to live victoriously despite problems, because we carry the name of the Lord.

Satan will tempt us at our weakest spot hoping to see us fall from grace. Even at this period of time, Satan is using the COVID-19 pandemic to try to rob many of their peace and faith in Jesus. Many have lost their jobs, closed their businesses, had their lives disrupted and many are feeling depressed and hopeless. Through all these challenging situations, we should ask, “What is God teaching us?” Let us not give in to the darkness of the pandemic but let us hold on to the Lord's promise as he said in Deuteronomy

31:6, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you, he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Yes, at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, while many of us are unable to see our family and friends, and to be with them physically, yet our God is great because he has given us online church services and Zoom meetings. I work in St. Paul's Day Training Centre as a coordinator. Ever since the Movement Control Order and its varied forms, we have been able to give our students online work. Recently we started to have Zoom gathering with our mentally challenged students. God has opened a new window for us even in this challenging time. Let us use the resources that God has given to glorify his mighty name!

Ponder

Hard times are designed to bring us closer to the Lord. Let us therefore endure our trials with grace and courage knowing that in the end, the clouds will part and the sun will shine again.

Promise

"No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so, I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5)

Prayer

Father, thank you for holding us together. We needed you and you were there for us. Thank you for your love, mercy, grace and faithfulness that was shown to us though we did not deserve it. To you alone be the glory. Amen.



Article by Veni Selvam, Lay Reader and Hon. Treasurer at St Katherine's Church, Kajang. Veni is also the Hon. Treasurer for Council of Churches Malaysia Women's Work and the Diocesan Golden Circle.

March 4, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 3:7-8

STANDING FIRM IN THE LORD

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 3:7-8)

The Apostle Paul was responsible for sowing the seeds of the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst the Thessalonians. Notwithstanding afflictions and distress at his end, Paul was tremendously encouraged by the feedback he received from Timothy that the new believers were standing firm in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Within our context, we may want to personally reflect on whether we are well anchored in our faith in Jesus. We may want the "Damascus moments" ("a fresh encounter with Jesus in our lives.") Fix our eyes and thoughts on Jesus. Pray without ceasing. Feed on the word of God daily. Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness Serve the afflicted and the marginalised. Do justice. Like the new believers of the Thessalonica Church, stand firm in the Lord. Keep the faith in Jesus *evergreen!*

One may ask with overpowering emotions, "How can I stand firm in the Lord when I am devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic? I have lost my job and my livelihood." Another cries out uncontrollably, "My entire business has been decimated." Yet another laments frantically, "I am in the midst of deep-seated mental anguish, depression and aggravated state of indebtedness. The creditors are threatening foreclosure proceedings and bankruptcy action. My family is in a total mess. What can I do? Where do I go?"

Go on your knees. We have an intimate connection with our Father in heaven. Cry unto the Lord for wisdom, "I call on the Lord in my distress and he answers me" (Psalm 120:1). The Sovereign Lord answers prayers. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Suffering, an inevitable earthly process, has purifying and refining effect. "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4). Hope gives us a positive mental framework through the power of the Holy Spirit to appreciate and to resolve the real-life issues before us in a practical manner.

We can draw divine inspiration and direction from the miracle narrated in 2 Kings 4:1-7 about a widow who was in a state of indebtedness. The creditor was coming to take her two sons away as slaves. She appealed to Prophet Elisha for help. She only had a "small jar of oil". Prophet Elisha asked her to get as many empty jars from her neighbours and fill all the jars with the oil from her own small jar. Miraculously, the oil from her small jar kept on flowing until all the empty jars were completely filled. She sold the oil and settled all her debts and she used the excess money for the needs of her family. Yes, our God is a God of limitless possibilities. Miracles and blessings will abound in God's given time when we *stand firm in the Lord*.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Just stand firm in the Lord. Jesus is Lord. "Stickability" with Jesus is the perfect answer to the "sticky mess" around us.

Ponder

As an act of faithfulness to God, can we look beyond our personal circumstances to invest in the next generation of believers and leaders? How can we encourage Christ-centeredness, passion, diligence, and faithfulness? What simple projects can we establish and support to uplift and to bless those suffering in our midst?

Promise

"Come near to God and he will come near to you." (James 4:8)

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, as we stand firmly and humbly before your awesome throne, we thank you for the inspiration and power you have given us to go beyond our own personal circumstances to uplift the down-trodden members of our community and to bring them hope, joy and peace in their lives. Amen.



Article by Mr D Raja Singam, the Diocesan Registrar and a member of the Provincial Synod. He is a member of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh, Perak.

March 5, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

A THESSALONIAN BENEDICTION

“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)

In today’s devotion, we can see three ways that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ helps us.

First, together with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, he leads and directs our paths.

Next, he infuses his love into our hearts so that we may learn to love others in the same unconditional way that he loves us.

Finally, our Lord Jesus strengthens and prepares us so that we can be found “spotless” when he returns in all his glory.

‘Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way...’ (v.11, ESV). Even the great Apostle Paul depended on the Holy Spirit for direction and leading. This world can be a confusing place to navigate especially if you are a Christian. There are many choices, directions and options for us to grapple with every day, so it is comforting to know that the Lord of the universe is ever willing to guide us. Proverbs 3:5-6 says it like this, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.”

‘May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all...’ (v.12, ESV). Isn’t this the core of the gospel? The essence of Christianity? Love. How often we must be reminded to love one another. To forgive one another? To be merciful to one another? For many, this simple command of Jesus, ‘to love one another as I

have loved you' (John 13:34) is easier said than done! Lent is the perfect opportunity to "abound in love" by our thoughts, words and actions.

'...so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness...at the coming of our Lord Jesus...' (v.13, ESV) Did you know that after you received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, he began a process to make you holy? The theological term is "sanctification". God is in the business of transformations! Just like he uses pressure and heat to change coals into diamonds, he is changing us daily into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ! Hallelujah!

What a beautiful benediction Paul has bestowed upon the saints in Thessalonica. May we too take great assurance in this blessing.

Ponder

Isn't most of the difficulties and conflicts we face a result of not seeking God's direction for our lives, not "abounding in love" for one another and not allowing the Holy Spirit to complete his work of sanctification in us?

Promise

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." (1 John 4:7)

Prayer

Gracious Father, direct my way today, help me to abound in love and give me the grace to conform to your process of being made "blameless in holiness" for your return. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Barnabas' Church, Klang.

March 6, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

LIVE IN ORDER TO PLEASE GOD

“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2)

How should we live to please God? Jesus gave us an answer in Matthew 22:36-40, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbour as yourself.” He went on to say, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

In our daily lives, however, things can be more complex. In the coming days you will read about keeping yourself pure, loving the brothers and sisters in Christ, living a simple life, supporting yourself with your work, avoiding being dependent on anyone else.

Danny Quah, a well-known professor of Economics, has recently been presenting on “Alternative Geometries of World Order”. He says, “Whether it's along axes of prestige or power (hard, soft, smart), once you start thinking who's no. 1 or no. 2, you're trapped in a linear hierarchy.” Instead, he discusses networks and other geometries for ways in which we should think about the relative importance of nations.

In the same way, we as Christians need an alternative geometry for thinking about how we are doing in God's kingdom. Both Jesus and the writers of the Epistles make it clear that the usual human measures of wealth, children, status in society, outward appearance, even status in church count for nothing in God's eyes. Instead, we are called to be holy, righteous and loving. Loving to everyone, not just those who are “like us”, not just those who are “like minded”, not just those who can be useful to us.

Jesus' geometry is upside down. The first shall be last, and the last first. Seat yourself in the humble place on the table (but don't refuse if you're called up to the honourable

place). Lead by serving. Seek to give, not to accumulate. See suffering as a blessing (because it will help to make us holy).

But, at the same time, Jesus calls us to be wise, to be good stewards of the blessings we have been granted, the talents we have been given. We shouldn't lock ourselves away like hermits or closed religious orders. Jesus went out into the world to share the Gospel, and so should we!

Ponder

How can I live to please God, in my particular situation, at this time?

Promise

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:6-8)

Prayer

Lord God, I pray that you will show me clearly how I – personally – should live to please you. Lord, you know my circumstances, my strengths, my weaknesses. Please allow me to be used as you will, to your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by Mr Edward Clayton, a lay reader at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur. He is a Partner in PwC Malaysia's advisory practice, a Malaysia PR holder and the Chairman of Navigate Together, a ministry serving Third Culture Kids in Kuala Lumpur.

March 7, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

RIGHT PASSION

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.”
(1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

People need encouragement to live rightly, even Christians! However, as Christians we look heavenward for divine help (James 1:5). We need the Lord to show us how we must walk to please him (1 Thessalonians 4:1). How should one walk in holiness? By remembering God’s call to sanctification (v.3a). Here in vv.3-8, Paul begins with the most basic of the meaning of human existence, sexual passion. Paul understood the prevailing culture and philosophy of the Graeco-Roman world. The very Gentile Christians he was addressing came out of that milieu. Under pressure, one can easily backslide.

First, Paul reminded them it was God’s will they should be sanctified – since it was God’s initiative (divine sovereignty).

Second, Paul reminded them that within God’s positive will, they must make a ‘clean cut’ from sexual immorality (*porneia*) (human responsibility).

Third, Paul laid down two important but practical principles to guide the Thessalonian Christians in their sexual behaviour namely, sex has a God-given context – heterosexual marriage (v.4a) and sex must operate in the manner of holiness and honour (v.4b).

Verse 4a sounds strange but its accepted meaning is ‘to take a wife’. Thus, the first practical principle is that heterosexual and monogamous marriage is the only context

in which God intends sexual intercourse to be experienced and enjoyed. By implication, sex in other contexts is wrong, whether before marriage (fornication) or outside marriage (adultery) or in a homosexual relationship.

The second principle explains the manner in which sex within marriage is to be conducted – not with ‘lustful desires like the Gentiles who don’t know God’ (v.5). These pagan ‘lustful desires’ have to do with crossing a forbidden boundary and coveting and possessing something forbidden. Whatever Paul is getting at must be something totally contrary to treating our spouses with “sanctification and honour”. Hollywood movies provide us a glimpse into abhorrent sexual perversions such as sadomasochism, domination, strangulation and snuff. Be warned, such dishonourable sexual practices can only invite God’s wrath (v.6b). The Gentile pagans indulge in perverse sexual practices because they don’t know God. How much more we who know God, who has called us to be sanctified for him! How can we rebel against God who has given us his Holy Spirit as a seal of ownership? (v.8).

Ponder

Marriage is God’s idea and a wonderful gift to be honoured and cherished.

Promise

For those of us who are married, we must keep faith with God by keeping the marriage bed with sanctification and honour. (See Hebrews 13:4)

Prayer

Pray especially for couples contemplating marriage or soon to be married to understand and commit to the Apostle Paul’s encouragement on biblical sexual ethics.



Article by the Reverend Lee Kon Yim, a Chartered Quantity Surveyor by training and Priest at St Mary’s cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

March 8, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

SEE HOW THEY LOVE ONE ANOTHER

“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more.” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)

In these two verses, we are reminded to love each other. It is interesting that verse 9 says that this love is not from within ourselves, it is from God, ‘you yourselves have been *taught by God* to love each other.’ It is God’s grace to us.

At his last meal with his disciples, Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34).

It is a commandment which some of us will find very difficult to obey. Some fellow Christians are truly hard to love! Sometimes, we do not even *want* to love them. And yet we know that God does not request or suggest that we love one another. He commands us to love each other.

This verse in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 encourages us to love, as we know that love comes from God, not from within ourselves. Our own sinful nature will not enable us to love one another as Jesus loves us.

The Bible also tells that God’s love compels us (2 Corinthians 5:14). God will pour his love in our heart to overflowing, if we let him.

And then, in verse 10, Paul talks about those in the Thessalonian Church loving others beyond their boundaries – ‘you do love all of God’s family throughout Macedonia’.

Our love should not just be confined within our own family, church and community, but should also go beyond our boundaries.

It is exciting to know that when we obey Jesus’ last command, which is to love others, this love will compel us to also obey his Great Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

We cannot truly love others without desiring them to be saved from the fate that awaits them. Love for others is our motivation to go tell the world about this wonderful Saviour that we have!

Ponder

This Easter, as we rejoice in the glorious hope of the Resurrection, think of one person you know for whom this Hope is not yet real. Pray, love and share the Good News.

Promise

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."
(Jeremiah 31:3)

Prayer

Father, Love it was that made us and it was love that saved us. Your divine nature is Love. Grant us grace to love all men so that we can partake of your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

(Adapted from the song, "Love it was that made us.")



Article by Ms A Annamaney, Chairperson of the Diocesan Anglican Care, and Anglican Alliance Regional Facilitator for East and South-East Asia. She is a member of St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya.

March 9, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

EARN RESPECT

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

We all like to be respected. Paul's advice is for us to win the respect of outsiders. One, by leading a quiet life. Two, by working with our own hands. Three, by minding our own business.

Working with their own hands might not be difficult for some but leading a quiet life and minding one's own business can be a great challenge to some. Some just love to be busy bodies because they have no business of their own. They are always free. Therefore, for them, the business of others becomes their business. They simply love to poke their noses into other peoples' personal matters. When Paul wrote this letter, there may have been Christians who may have given up their jobs because of their expectation of the imminent return of Christ. But Christ did not come back, and since they had no work to do, so they got busy getting into other peoples' business and living on charity.

Minding other peoples' business is not always bad when it is done with the intention of helping them. For example, we all love to get involved in our children's business because we love and care for them. Of course, we should know where to draw our line. I have seen parents trying to shape their children's family lives only to be told off by their children. So we must be careful. Another good example is, when a loved one or a friend is having problems and we are urged by love and the Holy Spirit to get involved and to help them. Our only intention is to help. When we show genuine interest in the welfare of others and when our intentions are pure, we will definitely earn their respect.

In today's passage, Paul advises the believers to lead a quiet life and mind their own business. Is he advising them to isolate themselves from others? Definitely not. Because the Christian life must be a witnessing life. We cannot lead a witnessing life by isolating ourselves from the world. Jesus did not isolate himself from the people. He was always surrounded by people. He was people-centred. He was not dependent on

charity. He was always doing something constructive. He was always reaching out to people. Like Jesus, we must also be people-centred and productive.

Lent is a good time to reflect on our spirituality and the calling to be witnesses. When we are respected by society, it is easy to witness for Christ. Therefore, we must be seen as those who are busy working with our hands, not as those living on charity and meddling in other people's affairs. Paul had set an example by working and supporting himself (1 Thessalonians 2:9–10). By minding our own business and taking a genuine interest in the well-being of society, we will definitely earn the respect of the people around us and we can shine for Jesus. Remember, true respect cannot be bought or forced, it can only be earned.

Ponder

When was the last time you genuinely felt led by the Spirit to get involved in the life of others? Do your friends see you as one who minds his/her own business but ready to help, or as a busy body poking your nose in other people's affairs and causing problems? Can you effectively share the faith if you are not respected by others?

Promise

An overseer or believer 'must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.' (1 Timothy 3:7)

Prayer

Dear Father, I thank you for your love demonstrated in Jesus Christ. Teach me to lead a quiet but productive life, minding my own business and at the same time reaching out to those who are in need. May my friends see me not as a person who lives on charity and a busy body but as one who loves and cares for them. May I reflect Jesus in every area of my life and earn the respect of my friends to be a witness for you, through Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour I pray. Amen.



Article by the Venerable Edward John, Vicar of St Christopher's Church and Archdeacon of the Southern Archdeaconry.

March 10, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

GRIEVING THE DEPARTED

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

The Bible frequently describes death as sleep. When his friend died, Jesus told his disciples in John 11:11, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.”

Death can be a beautiful picture. It’s peaceful, describing the quiet rest of the body.

It’s restful, describing how the body and soul are now at perfect rest from all labour and suffering. It isn’t final, describing the hope of being “woken up”. Death is a means to transport us from one life to another.

So, this text provides a great comfort to Christian believers who are grieving for fellow believers who have fallen asleep. Paul wrote because he knew that the Thessalonians might lack full knowledge and they were worried that those who died before Christ’s return would miss the resurrection. He sought to give comfort by pointing to the certainty of the Christian hope.

Notice that Paul does not say that we should not grieve. He says that we should grieve in a certain way: with hope. And he remarks that there are some (the rest) who grieve without hope. Christian hope is coherent. It is grounded in the Word of God, and we know that God cannot lie.

We can have hope because Jesus died, and we can have hope because Jesus rose again, the quintessence of the gospel.

We die because we sin. It is the curse given as a consequence of our rebelling against God who made us. It is a strange thought that comfort in our grief comes from the death of another. And yet Jesus’ death is unlike any other death in history. Jesus’ death means (will mean) the end of death.

We can hope in a future that is guaranteed because of the acts of the past: the act of Jesus coming to this earth to die; being raised from the dead; offering salvation to all those who believe in him; having gone to prepare a place for each one of us; promising to come back to this earth to fetch those who have accepted him and who have believed on his Name.

Jesus' death was not the end, and so we can have hope that our death is not the end either. It is based on the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. So, we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Ponder

As we face the reality of death, the reality of separation from a loved one, do we sorrow with hope, or do we sorrow as those who have no hope?

Promise

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.... I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:4-5)

Prayer

A prayer from Romans 15:13, NLT: "I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him."



Article by the Reverend Dr James Low, a Dermatologist in private practice and formerly Priest at Good Shepherd Church, Johor Bahru.

March 11, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

RISEN WITH CHRIST

“According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”
(1 Thessalonians 4:15-18)

This is a near standard text read at most funeral services. Certainly, a comforting connection to the words of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” (John 11:25). Paul’s new converts were struggling with the dilemma of the where about of their loved ones who passed away should Jesus return here and now. Will the deceased be left behind? Obviously, they believe in the bodily resurrection. Thus, Paul encourages the bereaved Thessalonians not to grieve without understanding: since Jesus died and rose again, the believers who die will likewise rise again. There is no pre-qualification nor post-qualification when Jesus their Lord comes back. Ultimately, Paul is telling them that the resurrection hope is a comprehensive graceful act of God that transcend human space time limitation.

Two thoughts:

Firstly, the coming of the Lord, the Parousia, is Christological in orientation. The main point is not about the individual survival after death but of the risen Christ in his supreme transformative act of resurrection existence. It is not about how worthy a person is that finally his immortal soul receives eternal reward or eternal punishment. The human centric idea of rapture has been much popularised in movies like ‘A Thief in the Night’, ‘A Distant Thunder’ and ‘Image of the Beast’ and the novel ‘Left Behind’. It often leads to wild speculation that somehow God’s divine act is subject to our human condition and response.

Secondly, the coming of the Lord is communal in essence. Our Christian hope is founded upon the restorative work of Christ in reconciling humanity. A more familiar term we use is the Kingdom of God when Christ will reign as king where 'every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:10-11). All things will be revealed where believers can rejoice in affirmation and non-believers can banish their doubts. We know not the time but are called to be watchful (Matthew 24:42); be prepared like a wise bride (Matthew 25:1-13) and be faithful stewards (Matthew 25:14-30).

This passage is an excellent message of consolation to any bereaved individuals. Yet it is also an invitation for look beyond and transcend our broken heartedness to the inclusiveness and eventual fulfilment of God's promise of salvation.

Ponder

"Every parting gives a foretaste of death; every coming together again a foretaste of the resurrection." (Arthur Schopenhauer)

Promise

"We live and die; Christ died and lived!" (John Stott)

Prayer

We don't know what we will hear. The call of an angel? The blast of a trumpet? This much we do know: we want to be here whenever you come. Make us ready, Lord. (Anne Osdieck)



Article by the Reverend Joshua Ong, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya.

March 12, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

“Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3)

It has been more than a year since our life was first disrupted because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Phrases such as “new norm,” “social distancing,” and “temperature check” are now part of our daily vocabulary. For some of us, there is a deep longing for things to go back to how they used to be – where we could travel abroad, meet physically as a church and not have to wear a mask whenever we go out. How much longer must we wait for that day? Some may put their hopes in the availability of vaccine so that life can be normal again.

Our present circumstances may not be too different from the situation in Thessalonica. Faced with trials and persecution (2:14-16; 3:3-5), the Thessalonians' lives had been disrupted since they became followers of Jesus. At the same time, a number of believers grieved for the death of their loved ones (4:13-18). Throughout his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul keeps reminding them of their ultimate hope in Christ and his coming again, as we read in our text today (see also 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-17; 5:23). Yet others, instead of placing their trust in Jesus, turned to the ‘Pax Romana’ (the Peace of Rome) ushered in by Caesar Augustus that resulted in the economic prosperity of the Roman Empire. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the ‘Pax Romana’ should never be their hope (5:3), just like the hope some place in the vaccine against COVID-19. The peace and safety that the world offers are at best temporary!

Paul's message to the Thessalonians reminds us that as we approach Easter, it is important to turn our attention to the true King in our lives. We live in difficult times. All of us, in some ways, have experienced trauma in the current pandemic. Some of us lost our jobs. Some of us have had our income slashed and we know of people going through mental health issues. Some of us wonder where God is as we navigate through these storms in our lives. Yet, throughout the trials, let us not place our hope in the

vaccine or the peace that the world offers but in Jesus himself, who will surely return one day 'like a thief in the night' (v.2). He is our true hope! Let us be vigilant, remain faithful to him, and be ready for his return.

Ponder

Are we ready for the return of Jesus?

Promise

"See, I am coming soon ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:12-13)

Prayer

Everlasting Father, your Son Jesus Christ will soon come again: help us fix our eyes on him, the author and perfecter of our faith, so that we will be ready to meet him when he comes. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Dr Lim Kar Yong, Lecturer in New Testament Studies, Director of Postgraduate Studies, and Director for the Centre for Bible Engagement at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Seremban.

March 13, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

LIGHT OR DARKNESS?

“But since we belong to the day,
let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate,
and the hope of salvation as a helmet.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:8)

Are you afraid of cockroaches? Ever wondered why these creatures usually “terrorise” us in dark places or at night? That’s because they are photophobic, meaning that they are afraid of light. They are also nocturnal insects, emerging at night to hunt and eat.

However, today’s Bible reading reminds us that unlike cockroaches, we who are in Christ are children of the day and of the light. We do not belong to the night or the darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5). God has graciously rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14). Through Jesus’ sacrificial death for sins, we have been saved from facing God’s wrath and judgment! Our salvation on the last Day is assured. Hence, we are not surprised by his return (1 Thessalonians 5:4), but instead, are called to live lives in anticipation of this great Day.

Unlike those who are of the night, who live in spiritual slumber and drunken stupor - following their own evil and sinful desires, chasing after the fleeting pleasures of this world and failing to recognize that there will be a day of reckoning when King Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, we are called to be awake and sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6-7).

What does spiritual awake-ness and sobriety look like? It’s being prepared for spiritual battle each and every day of our lives. As a people belonging to God, our lives are to be characterised by faith, hope and love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Having put on the breastplate of faith and love, we hold fast to our faith in Jesus and the assurance of God’s love for us in him, even as we seek to grow in our love for God, for one another in the body of Christ and for our fellow neighbours. The hope of salvation which we have in Jesus is to be our helmet, which guards us against temptations and helps us withstand life’s most difficult trials and challenges (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

May we as children of the day, declare the praises of the one who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

Since we belong to the day, let us journey in the light, putting on faith, hope and love as our armour for the fight.

Ponder

Do you live in anticipation of Jesus' return?

Promise

Even as we live as children of the day, we look forward to the day when King Jesus will return to rule and reign forever.

Prayer

Lord, please help me to live in readiness, in eager and joyful expectation of your Son's return. Amen.



Article by Marianne Liaw Sook Huei, a youth ministry worker with Scripture Union Peninsular Malaysia.

March 14, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

AWAKE OR ASLEEP?

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

Some days the alarm clock goes off in the morning, and it feels like a sudden and rude awakening from our sweet slumbers, when we would rather be asleep than awake.

Awake or asleep are two very different states of being – we are either one or the other. When we are awake, we are conscious - we are aware of ourselves and others, and of the world around us. But when we are asleep, we are unconscious and unaware of ourselves and our surroundings.

In chapters 4 & 5, Paul refers to those who are awake and those who are asleep in two different ways: Firstly, in the metaphorical sense: those who are “asleep” are those who are dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15) - by contrast those who are “awake”, are those who are still alive (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

Secondly, Paul uses the words with a spiritual sense: he refers to some who are humanly alive but asleep (dead) to spiritual realities (1 Thessalonians 5:6); whereas Paul means that the Thessalonians are not to be asleep, but humanly alive of course, and awake (alive) to spiritual things.

Those who are spiritually awake are prepared and expectant of Christ's coming (1 Thessalonians 5:8); these are the people who are living in the light and belong to the day. On the other hand, those who are spiritually asleep, are unprepared when Christ returns; these are people living in darkness, who belong to the night. To be found sleeping when we should be awake surely causes shame.

Paul is reminding and encouraging the Church that they are to be awake, alert and prepared for Christ's coming, and confident that we are appointed to receive salvation through Christ (v.9). He reminds and encourages the Church that this is a salvation for

all those who are in Christ, whether awake or asleep, living or departed, because of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus (v.10). And it is the glorious prospect of being with Christ always with which we can encourage one another (v.11).

I remember the school teacher who would bang on the table tell us “to wake up”, meaning to pay attention in the lesson! This is Paul’s goal to remind the church to be awake and attentive and standing firm in their faith and hope, so that they will not miss out on the coming salvation. Is he getting our attention?

Do we need a reminder about the dangers of being asleep to God – casual, complacent, contrary in our Christian living?

Ponder

Am I awake or asleep to the presence of God, awake or asleep to hear and respond to his voice, awake or asleep to living in readiness for Christ’s coming?

Promise

“He died for us so that ... we may live together with him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:10)

Prayer

Lord, keep us watchful and faithful in his service as we wait for our salvation. Amen.



Article by the Rev David Cox, head of the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform and Spiritual Director of Wellspring Retreat House, Rawang. David was Vicar of All Saints’ Church, Taiping (1983-1988 and 2013-2015).

March 15, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

RECOGNISE SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognise those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

These verses command us as Christians to Recognise Leadership. We are told to recognise those who are our church leaders, to esteem them very highly in love, and to be at peace with them. As a motivation to do so, we are called to consider the work they do among us.

Recognising Our Spiritual Leaders. The word translated “recognise” or in the KJV “know” literally means “to see, to know, to understand, to gaze or stare”. The gazing is with purpose; to understand, to know. How much do we pray for them?

Esteeming Our Spiritual Leaders. The word to esteem means “to think, to account, to judge, to govern”. It is an exhortation to be discerning and think rightly about them. Paul also gives us the manner in which we are to think about them: “very highly”.

The Command to be At Peace. At the end of verse 13 we are commanded: “Be at peace among yourselves.” This can be translated “cultivate peace with them”; meaning our pastors/elders. If we regard them “very highly in love”, we will endeavour to be at peace with them.

But how can we do this? Paul also gives us the right motivation and points to the work they do.

The Motivation for Obedience. Paul says it is “for their work’s sake”. Their work is described in terms of three things:

- a) **Their Labour.** Paul speaks of their “labour among you” – this “labour” is hard work to the point of fatigue. Being a pastor is no 9 to 5 job! It is more like 24 by 7!
- b) **Their Leadership.** Paul says they are “over you in the Lord” – literally to “stand before, to preside, to maintain, be over, to rule.” Leadership is a place of example. We

watch our leaders more than we know. It is in serving others well that we recognise a true spiritual leader. Many (leaders) look at “pomp and circumstance” and that does not generate recognition of true spiritual leadership.

c) **Their Teaching.** Paul says they “admonish you”. This means; “put in mind, to caution or reprove gently, to warn”. We often think negatively about admonition, but it is part of teaching.

The work of pastors or elders is spiritual work; it is work for eternity. This does not mean that every spiritual leader is always right in everything. Abraham, Moses, David and Peter made mistakes in their words and deeds. A wise pastor knows he is made of clay and will admit when he is wrong or when he needs expert counsel. If they humbly submit to God’s will, profound blessings accompany them.

Ponder

In our society do we give the highest regard to those with the most important work? How highly do we regard the work of the ministry? Why does the Lord consider this so important?

Promise

“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Prayer

Lord, may our spiritual leaders serve in love and be ever ready to forgive. And may each one of us recognise our spiritual leaders, appreciate them, and love them, as you love the church for which you gave your Life on the Cross. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



Article by Mr Jaccob Thomas, a member of Peace Community Church, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur and a Board member of St. Paul’s Theological College Malaysia.

March 16, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

WARN THE IDLE AND DISRUPTIVE

“And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)

Besides COVID-19, there is another major national health menace; another viral menace - dengue. It is an insidious disease, at least in this author's experience. It comes via a little mosquito bite that you may not have realised, and then attacks you from within. Then, when you need to be drinking lots of fluids to manage and to recover from it, dengue makes you nauseous, severely hampering you in the very thing you need to be doing. Without medical attention, it can lead to death.

In stark contrast to yesterday's passage, where Paul praises and commends those who work hard, Paul here urges the Thessalonian Church to warn those who are idle and disruptive. They seem to be a perennial problem, for they are also mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 3. They are able to work but choose not to. Instead, they depend on the welfare of the church.

Worse still, they disrupted the essential teaching of the gospel. The teaching of the gospel was crucial to this very young church because they were previously immersed in the pagan cults and beliefs of metropolitan Thessalonica, and presently faced significant opposition to their faith. So, the idlers and disruptors were hampering the church in the very thing they needed to be doing. In this way, the idlers and disruptors are like dengue. It is therefore right and important that Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Church to warn them.

In this Lenten season, as we reflect on the life of Jesus, we are reminded that Jesus himself admonished those who got in the way of his ministry - the Pharisees, yes, certainly; but also, Peter (Matthew 16:23) and even his own family (Mark 3:20-34). Such was Jesus' focus and resolve in doing the Father's will, even to the point of laying down his life on the cross. Therefore, let us be focussed, standing firm in the Lord as

we carry out the will of the Father, and be careful not to be disruptive to the ministry of the church.

Finally, let us also “encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else” (vv.14-15).

Ponder

Have we been disruptive in any way to the ministry of our church? Have our teachings become more about self-help or feeling good, than the transforming power of the gospel? Our fellowship groups become more about catch-up and chit-chat, than encouraging one another in the faith?

Promise

Jesus said, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt 12:50).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the privilege of serving you and your church; and that you have shown us, through your Son, to be always devoted to carrying out your will. Help us, through your Spirit, to follow his example as we serve you faithfully, to the glory of your name.



Article by Mr Daniel Chai, a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee. He worships at St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya.

March 17, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

GOD'S WILL FOR YOU

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Paul was coming to the end of his first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul listed out his exhortations one after another in short, succinct manner. Many of these are reflections of his specific concerns for the Thessalonian Church e.g., respect spiritual authority, reprimand the idle, don't retaliate with wrong for wrong. Then he came to verses 16 to 18 where under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he spoke of what they need to 'always' and 'constantly' do: be joyful, pray and give thanks, reiterating that this is God's will for them that is found in Christ Jesus.

Always be joyful because God has done so much for us in Christ Jesus. No circumstances can ruin this. God will continue to do exceedingly great and wonderful stuff for us and more than what we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21). Think about these things and our attention will turn to Christ and our hearts begin to rejoice. Joy (or happiness as I prefer to call it because we can relate to being happy better) is something less movable, less fleeting, less boastful, than temporary pleasures of life. And amazingly God wants us to be happy (many Christians struggle with this notion because it doesn't sound biblical). He designed joy (or happiness), not Satan.

Always praying because it's our lifeline. The reason we don't pray or don't pray always is because we depend on ourselves for solutions and sustenance, and not God. If we truly lived for him, we would learn that prayer is the only lifeline we need to cling on to amidst the rough sea of intimidating waves and predatory sharks. After a while of praying as our lifeline, praying later becomes natural to us, an automation, a constant companion of comfort and joy. What to pray? Everything! From thanksgiving to emergency requests, from cries of the heart to silence of a grateful heart. Church traditions have provided a rich source of contemplative prayers that we can explore e.g., “Jesus Prayer” of the Eastern Orthodox church, and “Centering Prayer” of Trappist monks from the United States in the 1970s.

Giving thanks in all circumstances is an amazing “will of God” for us. It’s because he is sovereignly in control of all things and still having us favourably in his mind. It’s because he is working things out for us in love (Romans 8:28). And that he will never leave nor forsake us. Giving thanks is remedy to our resentment and provide healing to our bruised soul. Giving thanks humbles us and gives peace to our troubled mind. Remember, it’s for all circumstances. The Lord is with us; our powerful Anglican exertion.

The Thessalonians had their fair share of persecution from outside and battles from inside, from issues of behaviours to core theological ones about Jesus’ second return and bodily resurrection. Yet they didn’t change a single thing about the spiritual reality they had experienced in Christ Jesus. It is God’s will that they and us be always joyful, always praying and always giving thanks.

Ponder

What are the current circumstances that are stopping you from being happy, praying and thanking God always?

Promise

Know that it is God’s will for us to always be joyful, praying and giving thanks.

Prayer

Teach me and enable me, Lord God, to do these three things constantly in my life.



Article by the Rev Dr Richard Loh Li Cher from St George’s Church, Penang. He is a team member of the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform, a Chest Physician in private practice and was formerly Professor of Medicine in two universities in Malaysia.

March 18, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT

“Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all;
hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

My favourite soft drink is 100PLUS. I believe it is one of the leading brands in isotonic drinks and very popularly promoted in sports events. This soft drink recipe was created by Fraser and Neave Limited or better known as F&N in conjunction with its 100 years of presence in Asia in 1983. It has citrus fruits content which is very refreshing. Coming indoors after a time of scorching heat outdoors or resting after some strenuous exercise, you feel a longing for a tall glass of cold 100PLUS to quench the thirst of the physical body. If you will imagine with me, after a time of sports activities when you perspired heavily, you long for a rest to recharge and replenish the salt and bodily fluid lost. 100PLUS is a very inviting companion. Gulp it down – quick or slow and you are refreshed. Then, surprisingly...the body lazes. That is what happens when our thirst is quenched.

However, we do not want to quench the Holy Spirit. Instead, we want an endless longing for more and more of the Spirit in our lives. The contrast is obvious. If we are quenched, we withdraw into a state of comfort, relaxation, and lethargy.

When Paul wrote that to the Thessalonian Church, these verses were part of his concluding address. As he concluded, he wanted to stress some very important points that his audience could remember; points to guide them in their daily living as victorious Christians; points that can lead them to grow deeper in faith. These important reminders he conveyed to them. One, “Do not quench the Spirit.” Two, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all.” Three, “Hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”

Paul wanted to exhort the believers to keep thirsting for the Holy Spirit. He wanted to affirm the necessity of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. He wanted to assure them that the presence of the Holy Spirit is needed to discern the

works of God. Prophecies are controversial these days during this (COVID-19) pandemic season. How do Christians discern the will of God in prophecies and through prophecies? Paul told the Thessalonian Church to constantly thirst for the Holy Spirit to enable them to discern correctly, holding on to what is good, and allowing the Spirit of God to lead them to “what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived — the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Ponder

In the midst of challenges the church encounters, have we unconsciously or consciously quenched the Holy Spirit when we expect events to unfold as we imagine they should, or do we let go and let God take charge to do great wonders we can never imagine?

Promise

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:7)

Prayer

Lord, teach us to constantly thirst for more of you in our lives. Teach us to never limit what you can do in and through us. Teach us to surrender totally to you and you alone. Amen.



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee. She works with the indigenous people groups in Malaysia and currently lectures full-time in Seminari Theoloji Malaysia.

March 19, 2021 – 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

THE ONE WHO CALLS YOU IS FAITHFUL

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-28)

In Stephen Covey's seminal work, “7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” Habit No.2 is “Begin with the End in Mind.” The thrust of his thesis is simple. If we know the end result of what we hope to achieve, that determines our current actions. He had an exercise where the reader is asked to write the epitaph on their own tombstone. What is it you want to be known for at the end of your life? Some examples would include wanting to live a legacy as a faithful husband, loving father or loyal friend. Our life mission should then ideally be to take proactive steps to achieve those goals.

For the Apostle Paul, the end, the second coming of Christ determines how Christians are to conduct their lives right now. How they are to live their lives is determined by their relationship with the heavenly Father.

He begins by drawing their attention to the God that they worship. He is God who has not only called them into his family but also faithful in fulfilling his promises for them. It is about who God is.

Who is the God that they were called to worship? He is the God of peace. He is the God who will sanctify and keep them blameless. These are acts of God in their lives, who desires that they live lives of holiness. The motivation to adopt this pattern of living is simply that Christ is coming back again (v.23).

Their right focus on who God is will enable them to walk the faith journey to the end of their lives or when Christ will return. This faith journey is one of trusting God to do his

work in our lives. It is his Spirit that we depend on, on a daily basis. It is, “Not I but Christ crucified” that we sing and claim as his promise for us.

The book then ends with an exhortation on how the believers are to live with each other. It is a reminder for Christian fellowship centred upon Christ. He called them brothers and sisters. He asked that they prayed for him (v.25). He emphasises the importance of greeting each other. They are to give, “holy kiss” (v.26). He directed that they are to read this letter to one and all (v.27). He ends by pronouncing God’s grace upon them (v.28). We therefore see a beautiful and warm picture of how believers are to live their lives. It is Christian community, and never alone.

Ponder

What is my understanding of the God I worship? Am I driven to pray and praise him for who he is and not merely for what he can give me?

Promise

He who calls you is faithful. It is a promise to cling onto in both good and challenging times.

Prayer

Almighty and Eternal Father, we ask that you help us to live a life marked by peace with both men and women, dedicated to seeking your holiness and desiring that you will return soon. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.



Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo, Pastor of Hosanna Anglican Church, Johor Bahru. A lawyer by training, he is the Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific and Country Director, Malaysia, Our Daily Bread Ministries.

March 20, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

GRACE, PEACE & THANKSGIVING

“Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.”
(2 Thessalonians 1:1-4)

1. **God’s love and faithfulness:** Our God always ministers his love and faithfulness to us as our Heavenly Father (vv.1-2). It is steadfast and perpetual, no matter how ‘big’ or ‘small’ our personal circumstances might be, how young or old we are as Christians, nor how overwhelming our sufferings we might be. We need to be more resilient and adept in discerning God’s fatherly love and faithfulness towards us at all times and in all circumstances.
2. **The central work of Jesus Christ:** Our faith, our spiritual life and all Christian work is based on the foundation of the unique and supreme work of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv.1-2). It then follows that the Christian faith, life and work exist and operate for the purpose of perpetuating and accentuating this foundation. This was inevitably true in the unique circumstances of the Thessalonian Church, and this will hold true in our unique circumstances and that of our respective churches.
3. **God’s grace and peace:** Our lives operate and develop by God’s grace, which is abundantly and sufficiently available for us. As we experience and enjoy God’s grace, we should minister to others, encourage others to discern and discover God’s grace at work, as what Paul, Timothy and Silas did for the Thessalonian Church. As Christians, we also live, operate and work in peace with God, and relate to one another with this peace. This peace comes to us from God through the work of Jesus Christ, who is the giver of God’s peace (John 14:27), and it is the *‘peace which passes all understanding’* (Philippians 4:7).
4. **The importance of thanksgiving:** As Christians, whether we realize it or not, God’s presence, power and work is continually in our midst. We must learn to see and sense his hand and his work upon our lives, and give praise and thanks to him. Our

irrepressible praise and thanksgiving to God will in itself thwart our enemy's attempts to impede and derail us. We also need to give thanks to God for his same presence, power and work that we might see and sense in the lives of other Christians. This would greatly encourage these other Christians, as Paul, Silas and Timothy did for the Thessalonian Christians (v.3 cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2:13, 3:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

5. **Giving Christian testimony:** Whenever we discern or experience God's good and gracious work in our lives, it is important and necessary for us to testify to others. We also need to give testimony when we see or hear the same happening in the lives of other Christians. Testimonies about God's gracious and significant work in our midst bring glory to God and edification to fellow-Christians. It also presents a good witness, and brings encouragement, to non-Christians.

Ponder

Our Christian faith and convictions cannot be "trusted" if it is not "tested". Let us consider and reflect on the constraints and challenges we face as Christians, and our responses to it, in the light of the above passage.

Promise

When we can respond favourably and spiritually to the above considerations, as Paul, Silas and Timothy did with the Thessalonian Church, our Christian lives will blossom, our Christian fellowship will be enriched and our churches will flourish!

Prayer

Almighty God, inspire and guide us to be ministering and encouraging servants and instruments of yours. Enable us to edify one another, and contribute to the growth of our respective churches and the advancement of your Kingdom on earth, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Tom Cherian, Vicar of St John's Anglican Church, Ipoh, Perak.

GOD IS JUST

“All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”
(2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)

Have you, like most people in the world, had a tough year? Or perhaps you have been mistreated unfairly by someone. At various times we all long for justice and for everything to be put right. The Christians in Thessalonica did not have it easy. St Paul had planted the church there but had been forced to leave them within just three weeks due to persecution. This young community of believers now faced trials and hardship without Paul and without even having the New Testament to read. Therefore, Paul writes this second letter of encouragement to them with words that still speak so powerfully to us today. In our verses for today, what encouragement does Paul give?

Firstly, he reassures us that there will be justice, everything will eventually be put right. He writes that “God is just”. Justice is an essential part of what it means for God to be loving. God is love, which means he can’t just overlook or turn a blind eye to all of the bad, unfair stuff in the world. Let this aspect of God’s loving character bring you reassurance as you face challenges in life.

Secondly, Paul explains that we might have to wait for ultimate justice to be done. He writes, “This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire”. Some things will only be put right at the end of time when Jesus returns, so don’t grow impatient if some things don’t yet seem right, they will be dealt with eventually.

Thirdly, we read that this ultimate justice comes in the form of a person, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Love has two aspects to it, justice and mercy. Justice demands a penalty be paid for wrongdoing, including our sins. Mercy suggests that we who deserve

punishment be set free. If God is love, how can he fulfil both aspects of his love, how can he fulfil perfect justice and perfect mercy in the world? The answer is the cross of Jesus. Only at the cross do justice and mercy meet. This Lent ponder how on the cross Jesus paid the penalty for your sin and my sin, for the sin of all injustice, and yet also took our place so that we might be set free and forgiven.

Finally, Paul reminds us that this good news of coming justice is for you and me. He says, "This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." To all who believe and put their trust in Jesus, judgement is not something to fear but something to look forward to as you will stand before the Lord, righteous, holy and forgiven because of the cross. And remember, in the end all will be well, so if right now all is not well, then that means it's not the end.

Ponder

Jesus' death on the cross is where perfect love, justice and mercy meet.

Promise

As Paul writes, 'This includes you,' hold on to the fact that you are forgiven and need not fear justice being done because of your faith in Jesus and his death on the cross for you.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that your Son died for me, so that I can be forgiven and righteous in your sight. I pray that upon Jesus' return, he would put all things right, make amends for every wrongdoing, and in the meantime, please would you give me the patience and strength to endure. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Miles Toulmin, Vicar of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Miles is also the Executive Director of Alpha Asia Pacific.

March 22, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

WE CONSTANTLY PRAY FOR YOU

“With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
(2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

As a young Christian, I remember going through prayer calendars for missionary organisations and for missionaries. I would tick them off as I went along. Fast forward thirty years and now my prayers are for my family and my church community; the areas of ministry of which I am involved with. Occasionally, I would go online to missionary organisations like Operation World, Teachers' Christian Fellowship and Scripture Union and catch up on their news and pray for their needs. There is a lot we can learn from Paul about prayer today.

Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians are constant. He prays for them to be worthy of God's calling. This is such a tangible expression of love. As Christians we are called to be like Christ. It is a lifelong process which begins when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Can you recall the moment you first surrendered your life to God? Paul writes to the Thessalonians appealing for them to not be idle. Some had stopped working because they thought that Jesus had already come again. Paul reminds them that ever since God has called them, he has been working in them in order that they are worthy of his calling. This means we cannot become complacent; we need to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.

Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians are informed. Although Paul is not there in person, he is fully aware of their growing faith and perseverance under persecution. Paul is able to continue to minister to the Thessalonians. He prays that God would bring to fruition their every desire for goodness and every deed prompted by faith. He reminds them to follow his teaching so that they are not led astray by false teaching but instead are prompted by the Spirit to delight in doing good. In the same way, we need to pray that our minds and hearts are in tune with what God has called us to do, helping us to resolve issues in goodness and faithfully producing good work.

Paul's prayers for the Thessalonians are purposeful. He prays for the name of Jesus to be glorified in their lives and them in him. Paul echoes the prayer of Jesus which he prayed for his disciples before his arrest. "All mine is yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them" (John 17:10). We need to pray for each other that people can see the glory of Jesus in our lives today. It is a process that must begin now if it is to be brought to its proper end when Jesus comes again.

Ponder

Are you praying for others? If not perhaps during this season, you can ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to pray for a particular person or Christian organisation? Do you have anyone praying for you? Perhaps you can join a prayer group or even start one? We need to pray for God's power.

Promise

"For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (2 Timothy 1:7)

Prayer needs self-discipline. The Holy Spirit can infuse us with this spirit of love for others, for self-discipline to pray constantly, knowledgeably and purposefully until we see God's power revealed in the lives of those we pray for.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us each day, especially during this season of Lent, to constantly lift our prayers up to fill the golden bowls of incense in heaven. Holy Spirit, empower us with the words to pray now. May the glory of our Lord Jesus be seen in our lives as we pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Article by Janet Clayton, Chairperson of the Board of Governors, Pudu English Secondary School, Kuala Lumpur and a final year seminarian at St Paul's Theological College. She worships at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

March 23, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

THE COMING OF THE LORD

“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us — whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter — asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)

The Christians in Thessalonica had been taught about the Day of the Lord when Christ returns in glory and power with his angels to gather the elect to himself. The coming of the Lord had given them much comfort and hope. But there had been rumours in the church, allegedly to be from Paul, that the day of the Lord had already come and they had missed the reunion with Christ. These rumours were causing significant distress, “unsettled” meaning “shaken,” like an earthquake and “alarmed”, the fear caused by surprise. They were undergoing such persecution, that they feared that they had missed the gathering together of the church.

Paul wrote to allay those fears, to encourage these suffering saints to persevere in the midst of trials and to ‘stand firm and hold fast to the teachings’ (2 Thessalonians 2:15). He reassured them that the coming of the Lord, and the church being gathered to him, would not come until two events first take place.

The first sign that Paul gives is that before Jesus returns, there will a great falling away, the Greek word is *apostasia* from which we get the word “apostasy”. What causes this rebellion? Paul then mentions the man of lawlessness or the man of sin. He will oppose all who worship God. He will instead, set himself in God’s temple. Some may interpret that a new temple will be built in Jerusalem but it can also mean that he will set himself to be worshipped in the church, the new temple of God. He is also called the Anti-Christ who will persecute the church. Many will die as martyrs but many will betray their faith and fall away, fearing for their lives.

Paul's focus is to remind the believers that these two events will happen before the Day of the Lord. While they wait, they ought to trust God and continue doing good rather than obsessing about the end.

In a world where we are increasingly beset by trials and tribulation, persecution and suffering, false teachings and unbiblical doctrines, let us trust in the Lord with all our heart. Let us familiarise ourselves with the truth of Scripture and demonstrate patient endurance. *Christians do not need to live in fear!*

Ponder

While waiting for the coming of the Lord, in the midst of all the anxieties, we should remain calm, preparing our lives, encouraging our brethren, and spreading the gospel.

Promise

Jesus had warned us that those that trust in him would inevitably go through tribulation. However, he had said, 'be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I pray that as we face these increasingly difficult times, I will patiently endure the trials and tribulations for Christ's sake. Help me to stand fast in the faith, to pray without ceasing, to rejoice in the Lord always, and in everything to give you thanks and praise! Amen.



Article by Canon Dr Teoh Soong Kee, Chairman of the Parochial Church Council, St Peter's Church Ipoh. He is a practicing Gynaecologist.

THE LAWLESS ONE

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:5-12 ESV)

How should Christians feel when faced with increasing evil and persecution? Are we overwhelmed by fear and uncertainty? Or are we cognisant of its ultimate purpose in the anticipated coming of the Lord? In today's passage, Paul commends the Thessalonian believers for their continual growth in faith and love despite experiencing persecution. He encourages them to be assured of the righteous judgment of God on those who afflict the Lord's church and reject the Gospel message. This judgment will coincide with the coming of the Lord Jesus. However, Paul also sought to guide those who were misinformed of the timing and manner of the Lord's coming by reminding them of what must first take place. The overarching message is clear: The revelation of the lawless one is not only an event prior to the second coming of Jesus, its purpose is to expose the utter depravity of both Satan and those who are perishing in anticipation of their deserved condemnation and eternal destruction. If we, as the persecuted church have been overwhelmed by increasing maliciousness, we would do well to be reminded of three important implications from this passage:

- The world is brought about to express its utter lawlessness and godlessness thereby exposing both the malicious scheming of Satan and the total depravity of humankind (vv. 8a,9-10).
- The second coming of the Lord Jesus will bring about obliteration of such lawlessness and evil, i.e., the righteous judgment of God (v.8b)

- God sends a strong delusion to those who are perishing as they embrace the falsehood of Satan and refuse the truth, thereby confirming the path of their condemned state (vv.10-12).

Easier said than done, but in the face of increasing evil and lawlessness, persecuted disciples of the Lord Jesus all over the world would do well to move beyond desperate and wishful hope for deliverance towards a Word-informed, Spirit-enabled posture of strength and conviction that God will not only ensure salvation of his Church in the new heavens and the earth, he will do so by first rooting out and obliterating any evil that cannot stand in his presence. Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us: (1) Persevere with the conviction that comes in the guarantee of God's unchanging Word. (2) Experience the joy of such hope that will be fully realised in the Lord's coming by his Holy Spirit. (3) Commit wholeheartedly to the way of righteousness in the Lord.

Ponder

In difficult times, especially when suffering as a Christian, have you prayed merely in wishful hope or with inspired conviction that God will make good on his word to completely triumph over evil and deliver his saints in glory?

Promise

Commit to a life of discipleship that is informed by all of God's Word as opposed to "blind faith."

Prayer

Righteous Father, even through the valley of the shadow of death, you are not only with me to comfort and deliver me, but also to destroy darkness, the unrighteous and lawless works of Satan. Help me to see your salvation as not just a personal deliverance from sin but a cosmic one whereby evil is obliterated everywhere, in your presence. In the Lord Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Paul Lau, a locally ordained Priest based at All Saints' Church, Cheras. His passion in ministry includes expository preaching and the expression of the Gospel message through artistic means.

March 25, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

CHOSEN FIRSTFRUITS

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

Have you ever been so grateful for something that you could not stop thanking God for it? It is indeed right and proper to be grateful to God and to thank him for it. Paul's prayer exemplifies this attitude. His prayer also reveals him to be other-person centred. He is not just concerned with receiving praises for serving people or gaining a sense of self-fulfilment for having achieved some ministerial responsibility. Paul is passionately concerned for people and is elated when they grow in godliness as they hear the word of God and respond to it rightly. And if our thanksgiving is proportionate to how important something is to us, then his Christian brothers' growth must have been incredibly dear to him for he gives thanks for them unceasingly (v.13). Here is a Christian brother who is deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of others.

The context helps us understand his joy. In chapter 1, he warns the Thessalonians about the reality of God's judgment, and in 2 Thessalonians 2:12, mentions that it is those who do not believe the truth and delight in wickedness who will suffer this judgment. But unlike the 'man of lawlessness' (2 Thessalonians 2:3), the future is bright for the Thessalonian Christians. They are those who are loved by the Lord Jesus and chosen by God from the beginning of the world (The word 'firstfruits' in the NIV is probably better translated as 'the beginning'. See Matthew 19:4 for an example of this translation). They were chosen to be saved from their sins by God who set them apart (sanctified them) for himself through his Holy Spirit and through their believing the word of truth – the gospel of the Lord Jesus that was brought to them by Paul. And God did all this so that they might share in the glory of the Lord Jesus, which will be visibly manifested when he returns for his people.

Ponder

Scriptures remind us repeatedly that God is holy and just and will not tolerate sin. It is something that we need to remember. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. Yet this season reminds us that he loves us so incredibly much that he would send his Son to die for us. What amazing grace! It is only as we remember his wrath and mercy that we would be driven with Paul to be grateful to God for choosing to save us.

We also learned that to love others is to desire their growth as Christians through responding correctly to the word that they are taught. This then impresses on us the importance of wanting to encourage others by helping them know God through his word, praying that the word would take root in their hearts and gratefully giving thanks to God when he grants that.

Promise

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard **through** the word about Christ. Praise God for his promise that all who are appointed to eternal life will believe.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for choosing us and enabling us through your Spirit to trust in the gospel of the Lord Jesus for our salvation. We thank you for those who have laboured in teaching us your word and have prayed for us to grow in it. Please help us to hold firmly to the truth of the gospel. Please help us to love others enough to take seriously the need to help them grow in the knowledge of your word and to pray for them unceasingly as we wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.



Article by the Reverend Nick Loi is the Pastor of Christ Church, Ipoh.

March 26, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17

HOLD FAST TO THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

“So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17)

Called to Stand Firm: Paul concludes this section of his letter with a call to ‘stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter’ (v.15). This exhortation comes in the context of the threat of false teaching dealt with earlier in chapter 2:1a-2, ‘we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.’ Evidently, false teachers claiming to speak for Paul have spread false teaching about the last days and the return of Christ. Having cleared up these matters, Paul urges them to hold fast to the truth that he taught them.

The danger of moving away from apostolic teaching to embrace aberrant false teachings is as real today as it was for the Thessalonian Church. Whether it be Prosperity Teaching, falsely promising health and wealth if we have enough faith, or Liberal Teaching denying biblical sexuality by condoning homosexuality and same-sex marriage, or Liberation Theology redefining the gospel in terms of social justice instead of salvation from sin, false teachings abound in the church. Paul’s exhortation to stand firm in apostolic teaching is one we need to hear.

How do we stand firm? Unlike the Thessalonian Church, which also had access to Paul’s spoken word (v.15), we have access to apostolic teaching only through the writings of Paul and the other apostles in the New Testament. There is a great need then for all Christians to study the Bible and have a clear grasp of its truth. In many circles, the serious study of theology and Scripture has been displaced by an emphasis on spiritual experiences or pragmatic programmes designed to bring church growth. Biblical literacy is low, and in many places, worsening. But a superficial understanding of the Scriptures puts the church in profound danger of being led astray. To stand firm and hold fast to the Scriptures, we must know them thoroughly.

Transformed by the Truth: Ultimately, Paul grounds his confidence that the church will stand firm in God himself. He prays in verses 16-17, “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.” It is God, through the grace and love of the gospel, who will so comfort our hearts that they bring forth every good work and word. Here we see why a clear grasp of the gospel is so crucial. Because it is only the true gospel that God brings real hope to our hearts and lasting transformation to our lives.

So, let us hold fast to the gospel, that God may do his transforming work in our hearts and lives.

Ponder

Do you have a deep grasp of God’s word? How might you dig deeper this year?

Promise

God promises to comfort our hearts and transform our lives through the gospel.

Prayer

Pray that God will enable you to stand firm in the truth.



Article by the Reverend Tim Nicholls, Curate at St George’s Church, Penang. Tim is a committee member of the Diocesan Children’s Ministry. He is married to Siew Mun and they have three children.

March 27, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3

SEEKING PRAYERS

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:1-3)

It is pretty common nowadays to hear Christians asking fellow Christians, “Please pray for me.” It may be a personal request as in the case of individuals requesting prayers for physical or spiritual healing or even corporate request for guidance upon the Church and her leadership, for example, guidance in nominating a new diocesan bishop. The electronic media has made this all the more possible but the question is whether we merely pay lip service to such a request or really pray for the other person(s)? For some Christians, the phrase, “Please pray for me” may merely be a cliché, but St. Paul fully believed in it. We see that pointedly in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3.

Paul closes his second letter to the Thessalonians by seeking prayers for his missionary team, particularly for Silvanus and Timothy (v.3:1). It reveals Paul’s awareness of his need of God and the importance of the prayers of the saints on our ministries. Unfortunately, much Christian work is determined by dependence on the strategies employed and in the dynamic personalities of people rather than on a prayerful dependence on the Lord. Here was a “giant” of a saint used mightily by the Lord and yet he humbly sought the prayer of the saints in Thessalonica.

The content of their prayer is twofold and both parts were ultimately related to the progress of the gospel, even though the second request was more personal, that is deliverance from ‘unreasonable and evil men, for all have not faith’ (v.3:2). The first request is that the message of gospel may spread progressively but in view of the fact that Satan and this world are always at work to hinder the message which led Paul to seek a second request. The message scored amazing success among the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6, 8; 2:13.) Paul and his team wanted this to be replicated.

Paul quickly turns to focus on the Lord and his faithfulness which turns our attention to the “being” of the Lord and his character. While there are many who do not have faith in the Lord and may oppose the gospel and its messengers, we can rest in the Lord because he is faithful and trustworthy. And this Lord will ‘*strengthen*’ you and ‘*protect*’ you from the evil one’ (v.3). Both these verbs are called “gnomic futures” in that they portray that which is true of the Lord at any time.

Ponder

Do I really pray when people ask me to?

Promise

“Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.”
(Psalm 126:5-6)

Prayer

“Abba, our Loving Heavenly Father, our prayers may be awkward and our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, help us to believe that our prayers do make a difference. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

– adapted and paraphrased from Max Lucado’s quote.



Article by the Right Reverend Dr Jason Selvaraj, Area Bishop of the Southern Peninsula and Vicar of Christ Church, Malacca.

PALM SUNDAY

"The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him." (John 12:12-16)

Today the church worldwide, celebrates Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday commemorates the triumphant arrival of Christ into Jerusalem days before he was to be crucified.

Crowds of people followed him waving palm branches and praising him as king. What was running through Jesus' mind's as he saw this public acclamation of him. Was he deceived by this popular outpouring and acclaim? Did he suppose that at last, after their rejection of him for so long—they were now going to accept him as their Messiah? No! he knew it was only the outburst of a day. He knew this was but the first stage of *his last journey to the cross* and as he heard the shouts of the crowd, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!*" there was an undertone ringing in his ear, and the words of the undertone were –

"Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp—ride on to die!"

To Jesus the triumphal entry set the scene for the prophecy fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9. It meant going to a cross, not an earthly throne. It was a declaration of his Messiahship.

As we participate this morning in the ritual of waving palm branches, processing and praising God, seeing in our mind's eye the procession that took place nearly 2000 years ago and Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, there are many things that stand out. Of these there are three we must bear in mind: -

First, Jesus himself was setting his crucifixion in motion. Remember this is the first time Jesus allowed the people to praise him as King. In allowing the people to praise him, he had angered the Jewish and Roman leaders thus orchestrating the situation and

setting things in motion for the Passion Week. He was coming to save us as prophesied by Zechariah.

Secondly, Jesus was being selected as the Passover Lamb. As Jesus was riding in and the people were crying “Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” unknown to them they were selecting the paschal lamb for sacrifice; the one and only sacrifice that could take away the sin of the world.

Finally, Jesus was marching to his death, and he knew it. And as he rode, Jesus’ mind would have first been focused on glorifying his Father. Then, his thoughts would have been directed on those he had come to save. He would have seen our faces, knowing that without his death, he would have to watch us die, for we were born sinners, hopeless, and condemned already. Whatever Jesus was thinking that day, he was not going to let anything stand between him and his beloved children.

Ponder

When Christ hung, and bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.' – Billy Graham

Promise

“...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Prayer

Merciful Father, as we enter Holy Week, turn our hearts again to Jerusalem, and to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Stir up within us the gift of faith that we may not only praise him with our lips, but may follow him in the way of the cross. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Article by Ms Esther Richards, Editor of the Diocesan Anglican Messenger. She is currently involved in coordinating the Community Bible Study in St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.

March 29, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 3:4-5

CONFIDENCE ?

“We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.” (2 Thessalonians 3:4-5)

Confidence is often easily misunderstood. It can appear at best presumptuous, and at worst, hubristic (full of pride). One definition of confidence says confidence is “knowing your value, without proving your worth”. Nicky Gumbel once said, “knowledge is like underwear. It is useful to have, but not necessary to show it off”!

In today’s scripture, we see an interesting application of confidence. We commonly think of confidence as an attribute rooted in *ourselves* for *who we are or what we will do*. However, Paul writes about a different confidence – one that is rooted in *the Lord* and for who the church is, and what *they* will do. The best way to know if our confidence is prideful is to know who our confidence is in. Lend your confidence to others, entrust them – and you will see fruit in other branches of the tree.

Here in these verses, we see a model for how Christian leadership works: first, the clarity of the command. Second, the confidence of its completion by others. Nothing we can do as leaders can be done alone. The Lord uses people to build people, and he is coming back for his Church, a collective of individuals united in love and vision. The only way we can do his will and complete his work is to empower other leaders and invite them on this journey of obedience; to think with a mindset of ‘team’ rather than a mindset of ‘me’.

The leadership lesson in Paul’s words is simple: “if you have any confidence, share it!” Empower another person, raise a team, entrust them with responsibilities and allow them to make mistakes – so that they may grow in doing the things God commands, into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance. Our task is to clarify the goal and define the parameters, then to have confidence that the work belongs to the Lord, and he will equip his people to do *his* work. When leaders fail to let go, they forget that the ministry never belonged to them in the first place. May our greatest legacy be to raise successors better than us.

Ponder

Who can I entrust my confidence to today? Who is a younger, newer leader than I am, who I can raise?

Promise

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)

Prayer

Lord, help us to put our confidence in you. Help us to trust you that you can do in others what you have done for us. Use us to be a channel of your love and power, to pastor and nurture your church to do your will.



Article by the Reverend Abel Cheah, the service pastor for The Five, the evening service of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang. He is also the Chief Operating Officer of Alpha Asia Pacific.

March 30, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-15

A MODEL FOR YOU TO IMITATE

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer." (2 Thessalonians 3: 6-15)

Good role models! Where do we find them? Whether we like it or not, we all tend to model our lives on someone. It can be our parents or someone we look up to as we go through the different phases of our life's journey. Today, many people look up to popular people in society like artistes and sports personalities and model their lives after them. These role models influence us as we look at and copy their lifestyle and pattern of living.

Paul exhorts the believers in Thessalonica to look at him and his fellow ministers as role models when he says, "imitate us" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). This is a call for us to look at the servants of God in Scripture and through them to Christ as our primary role model and focus. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1 says, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." So as Paul invites the believers to copy him, he is ultimately pointing them to imitate Christ.

One particular area which Paul addresses here is the issue of idle living (vv.6,11). Due to misconceptions about the true meaning of the Christian life there were believers who

were living idle lives. They were practicing “*idle-tery*” which means they were idling around and not living purposeful lives. Similarly, some of us also may choose to become idle after reaching retirement age. These idlers were lazy, so much so that they refused to work and earn a living for them and their families. They were strongly rebuked and warned. We may come across some who choose to be idle for various reasons but the danger is when it becomes a continuous pattern and on-going lifestyle.

Paul exhorts by quoting the example of him and his fellow workers who worked and earned their living. He says, ‘with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you’ (v.8). This is the example that he exhorts the believers to observe and follow. The Thessalonians were given an “example to imitate” that they were to work and earn their living.

Today, as we face the temptation to remain idle and do nothing, we are rebuked to arise from our lazy slumber. We are called to imitate the Biblical role models like the Apostle Paul in living fruitful lives ultimately for the glory of God. May God give us his grace to break free from “*idle-tery*”.

Ponder

Why do some people choose the option of being idle and lazy?

Promise

If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10)

Prayer

Father, help us to break free from idle living, to do good, and to live our lives fully for Your glory and praise. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Jesvinder Singh, Vicar of St. James’ Church, Kuala Lumpur and Priest-in-Charge of St. Matthew’s Church, Selayang.

March 31, 2021 – 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16-18)

At the end of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul responds to a church facing the trials of persecution, false teachings and difficult dealings among her members. In such precarious circumstances, his appeal and encouragement are simple, yet profound – that the church will find peace from the bearer of Peace itself – the God whom they worship.

The experiences of the Thessalonians were not confined to a particular time and space – they are universal and are still being felt today in different shapes and forms. As we reflect through recent times, we need to acknowledge that the world is a very broken place to live in. Creation cries a different song in the mornings, people cling to addiction in an attempt to make sense of their pain and suffering; others resort to lies and deceit to survive and perpetuate hurt and we, as believers, are brought down to our knees in prayer for any, and every sense of peace.

Paul’s words of grace and peace sum up his heart’s yearning for the church in Thessalonica, and he leaves them with a two-fold blessing: 1) that peace is found in the presence of the Lord; and 2) that the peace from God guards the heart. As believers, this is the assurance – that in all circumstances, God’s peace which surrounds and shields the heart, is found in his very presence. God’s peace brings comfort and rest, refreshing the soul and renewing hope; an experience which transcends human understanding.

As we look forward to the days ahead, let us journey on with the presence of God. He who gives us his peace (John 14:27), will guide and sustain your spirit. Take heart, and let us continue to serve the Author of Peace and sow seeds of faith, hope, love and peace in the fields before us.

Ponder

Do you have a place/space which is peaceful and/or reminds you of peace? If you are able to, visit that space, otherwise think of it and reflect on the following: How can I seek his presence every day and submit to his authority over my life? How do I apply the knowledge of God's peace in all circumstances I face?

Promise

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:27 NIV).

Prayer

Thank you, Lord for being the bearer of Peace, and for the assurance that your presence is with me in all circumstances. I admit that my heart has been troubled, and I repent for any doubt or disbelief that you are sovereign over all. I am choosing to rest in you, to submit to your peace, and allow your grace to be my strength to face the days ahead. Amen.



Article by the Rt Reverend Dato' Charles Samuel, retired Area Bishop of the Northern Peninsula. Bishop Charles is Priest at St Paul's Church, Bukit Tengah, Penang.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”
(John 13:8b)

We’ve come to the end of our exploration of Paul’s letters to the church in Thessalonica and now we’re invited, once again, to gather around the table as Jesus celebrates his final Passover Meal here on earth. Seated with him are those who have accompanied him on his three-year adventure from unknown Nazarene to renowned miracle-worker. But who was at the table with Jesus? Tradition suggests that it was just the twelve named apostles, but I suspect there were others, whose names have disappeared in the mists of time. Passover was a family affair, a joyous celebration of the nation’s release from slavery in Egypt, so it’s very likely that friends, supporters, and family members were also present.

One of the things I have learned during my stay here, is just how much Malaysians enjoy their food! When I asked how many meals Malaysians had each day, I was told ‘just one – it lasts all day’! Sadly, COVID-19 has meant that we’ve missed out on a lot of the celebrations and family gatherings that we once took for granted. We haven’t been able to gather around the table with friends and family, and we haven’t been able to gather together as the family of God at the Eucharist. I suspect that Jesus’ friends assumed that they would gather again the following year as usual. But this Passover was different – as the evening meal was being served, Jesus moved from the place of honour at the head of the table to the place of the house servant and knelt at the wash bowl.

Traditionally when we read this passage, we focus on the need for us to serve one another in the way that Jesus served his disciples. But in verse 8 we read, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.” So, I wonder if he was also reminding them of the need to kneel regularly and repeatedly at his feet to seek and receive forgiveness of their sins?

As I have learned to kick off my shoes whenever I enter someone’s home here, maybe I also need to learn the importance of regular spiritual cleansing? Each time we gather around the Lord’s Table, we confess our sins and hear the words of forgiveness. But, as we approach Easter, can I suggest that a deeper and more profound confession is called for? If possible, spend time this evening in quiet contemplation. Invite the Holy

Spirit to reveal those areas of your life which are not pleasing to God. Listen to what the Spirit says and bring what you hear before your Heavenly Father. Be honest with God and honest with yourself. It is easy to fall into bad spiritual habits, so let this evening be a time of deep spiritual cleansing. Allow God to minister to you as he reveals the dark areas of your life and receive his forgiveness.

Then, together we may journey to the cross unburdened by sin, ready to receive all that Jesus has prepared for us, as we celebrate his glorious resurrection once again this Easter. And let's look forward, not just to future family gatherings, but also to the time when we will join with the heavenly throng in the eternal celebrations of the New Jerusalem.

Ponder

I wonder what it must have been like for the people at Jesus' last supper? Were they shocked at his behaviour? Surprised? Or maybe confused? Imagine how you would react if something similar happened to you.

Promise

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:19)

Prayer

Father God, as we remember the events of that first Maundy Thursday, remind us that you are always with us, especially when life shocks, surprises or confuses us. Whatever happens in our lives, may we hold fast to your promises, trust in your unfailing love, and look forward to that day when we will sing your praises for all eternity.



Article by the Reverend Jacqueline Rodwell, an Anglican Priest, ordained in the Church of England. She recently returned to Europe after three years living in Malaysia where she ministered with All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

IT IS FINISHED !

“Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”
(John 19:28-30)

Jesus, ‘knowing that everything had now been finished’ (John 19:28).

The gospels record Jesus speaking seven times from the cross. We now come to the final words. Jesus continues to be fully in control. His life has been lived in obedience to his Father’s will. Jesus said in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

‘So that Scripture would be fulfilled’ (John 19:28).

Scripture reveals God’s will. Jesus perfectly knew and accomplishes God’s will. During late 2020 I undertook to read the Bible in three months. I had never read the bible in such a short time before. It gave me a unique overview of God’s plan and purpose and how they all centred in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Marking the passages in the Old Testament referring to “the Suffering Servant”, as I moved into the gospels, I saw how everything was coming together especially as I came to the end of the Gospel of John. Jesus cried out, “It is finished” (John 19:30) and rose from the dead on the third day.

“I am thirsty” (John 19:28).

Jesus had been scourged, bleeding, hung on a cross under the sun - the “Suffering Servant”. The soldiers, as was the custom at a crucifixion, had a supply of cheap sour wine. They dipped a sponge into it and pressed it to his lips. Jesus then speaks for all to hear.

“It is finished” (John 19:30)

In the original language it is one word. It signifies completion. Jesus’ work was done. But this is no cry of defeat or simply an announcement. This particular word carries the

idea that the task given has now been completed, accomplished. The 'ransom for many' has been paid in full. "Father, the hour has come. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:1,4)

"With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30).

This is not the usual way that the gospels speak of death. This word basically means - go to bed. No one took his life from him! Jesus gave his life bearing the punishment and guilt for our sin. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

All the action here is purposively carried out by our Lord Jesus. In giving his life, he bears in full, in his own body on the cross, that punishment for our sin which we justly deserve. Paid in full!

Ponder

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."

Promise

Romans 5:1-2, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God."

Prayer

Victorious Lord, you accomplished on the cross our complete redemption. Through your perfect all sufficient sacrifice, sin is conquered, death is destroyed, heaven opened. To God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.



Article by the Right Reverend Peter Tasker, the Archbishop of Sydney's Bishop for International Relations. Bishop Tasker was once the Vicar of St George's Church, Penang.

THE COURAGE TO ACT WITH LOVE

“Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (John 19:38-42)

Holy Saturday was also the Sabbath Day, when no work could be done according to Jewish custom. Hence the hurry to take down the body of Jesus and place it in a tomb. John's account of the Passion has several differences from that of the other three Gospels and this short account is no exception, and they are significant.

Joseph of Arimathea is identified by Mark and Luke as ‘a member of the council’, who was ‘waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God’. Luke adds that he had not ‘agreed to their (the Council's) plan of action’. Matthew goes so far as to call him a disciple, but John suggests that Joseph was a secret disciple because he feared the Jewish leaders. Only in John does Joseph join up with Nicodemus, who, he reminds us, ‘visited Jesus at night’. Nicodemus brings the necessary spices. So, whereas, John says, the disciples had forsaken Jesus, fled the scene and were locked indoors ‘for fear of the Jews’ (John 20.19), these two had the courage to step up and go to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus and then care for him with love, laying him in a garden tomb in which no-one had laid before. This poses the question for us, “Are we courageous disciples?”

Christian action in word and deed has never been more important. Communities across the world are crying out for healing love, for justice and care. Yet our societies are so often preoccupied with seeking their own survival and success. They need to be challenged. In everyday life, however, it is very easy to conform to the herd. We do not

want to 'rock the boat' by challenging what is decided and said, not just in the councils of our society, but in the conversations of our own life, at work and at home. And yet, Jesus did just that. He spoke out for love to guide life more than laws and the social mores, and we are called to follow the example of Jesus. This may mean saying uncomfortable things, even being a bit unpopular. Joseph, although not a committed disciple of Jesus, did not agree with the majority. Nicodemus was not sure and 'came by night', but he did the right thing in the end. Christians do not hold the monopoly of acting with courage for love, but they should certainly be at the forefront.

Ponder

Are there times in your life and ministry, when you have been slow to speak out against the herd or failed to act with love through lack of courage?

Promise

Jesus said 'the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth' (John 16.13) and 'remember I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28.19c).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant that I may, today and every day, be not slow to speak out, but be given the courage to challenge in the cause of love; to speak and act with confidence, so that you may bring new life and hope into needy hearts and lives, in the pattern of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Canon Tony Barnard, former Canon Chancellor of Lichfield Cathedral, England. Tony and his wife Anne, hosted many Malaysian Anglicans when they visited Lichfield during the years of our diocesan companion relationship.

I HAVE SEEN THE LORD

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news:
“I have seen the Lord!”
And she told them that he had said these things to her.”
(John 20:18)

I have heard some people sharing that they have seen the Lord, and some have heard the Lord speaking to them; some in their dreams, some in their visions, yet others literally with their own eyes or ears. I do not doubt them at all. Many lives are transformed or changed by such events, including the Apostle Paul. The Apostle John in John 20 described that Mary Magdalene saw the risen Lord Jesus with her own eyes and heard him speaking to her too.

Even decades after the event happened, he still remembered and has recorded this event affirmatively, and describes it in his gospel, vividly depicting a very significant and important incident in the lives of Mary Magdalene and himself. I treasure and wish that day will come where everyone can see Jesus with their own eyes or hear him with their own ears. I pray this day will come soon.

I personally have not seen Jesus with my own eyes but I have literally heard him with my own ears. This incident happened 43 years ago while praying one day and I heard him saying “*My son, you are not your own, for you are bought with a price, with my blood.*” At that moment, I immediately felt my whole body warming up and a sense of release and confidence came upon me. A few days later, I offered myself to the Lord’s full-time service at a Sunday service. It is now history but significant for me, indeed.

The Call of God is so simple yet so powerful. It has changed many lives, including Mary Magdalene and the Apostle Paul. It is a Call to adopting a simple lifestyle – a life which is set apart for holiness, adopting the “not my will but yours be done” mentality, constantly seeking “speak Lord for your servant is hearing” and “we are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty.” This is so contrary to the world’s value of “I, me and mine first.”

The announcement of Mary Magdalene to the disciples was an announcement of the beginning of a new era – a life with the risen Christ, a life of counter-culture, a life in

the Kingdom of God, a life of a true disciple of Jesus, and a life of “Jesus increasing and I decreasing.”

Ponder

Do I really want to see or hear from the Lord? Am I prepared to live a life following Jesus' Call which is different from my present lifestyle? How can I be more Christ-like?

Promise

Whom the Lord calls, he will also be equipped and prepared.

‘God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?’ (Numbers 23:19)

Prayer

Almighty God, grant us grace to accept your goodness, faithfulness to obey your Will, strength to press on towards the upward Call, love to experience your presence, and patience to hope for your appearing again; prepare our hearts to seek after your holiness, our minds your purity, and our souls your mercy. This we pray and ask in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, together with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Article by the Right Reverend Datuk Ng Moon Hing, our 4th Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia. Bishop Moon Hing retired on 12th November 2020, after 13 years of episcopal ministry in the Diocese of West Malaysia.

COLLECTS

Ash Wednesday

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Palm Sunday

Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Maundy Thursday

God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper which your Son gave to his Church to proclaim his death until he comes: may he nourish us by his presence, and unite us in his love; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Good Friday

Almighty Father, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Easter Eve

Grant, Lord, that we who are baptized into the death of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ may continually put to death our evil desires and be buried with him; and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; through his merits, who died and was buried and rose again for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Easter Day

Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity.