

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you have received from us. ...For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.”

Today’s sermon is brought to you by the Board of Stewardship.

In all seriousness, we do well to consider Paul’s words. Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians after he was forced to flee the new congregation. That letter was full of words of thankfulness and praise as opposition and false doctrine did not persuade the Thessalonians to abandon or compromise their faith. They did have questions, though, regarding what death means for believers and how the Last Day would happen. So Paul also patiently instructs the saints of Thessalonica by writing to them.

However, as it always goes, Paul’s letter led to more questions. Some misunderstood Paul’s teaching that the Day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night and were afraid they had missed Christ’s return. Others twisted Paul’s words to excuse themselves from participating in the daily work and life of the congregation.

So Paul writes once more as a patient father to reassure his children in the faith that they have not and will not miss out on the Day of our Lord’s return but are to watch and wait for it in faithfulness. He then begins to conclude by asking for their prayers, “that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you,” that Paul and his companions “be delivered from wicked and evil men.”

Paul’s prayer request is not only for his sake and the sake of those whom he will next encounter but also for the Thessalonians themselves. In asking for the word to be honored, just as they had already honored it, Paul is preparing them to receive the word he is about to speak. He says he is confident the Lord will establish and guard them so that they will receive his word of admonition in the confidence of their faith.

“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” This word, ‘idleness,’ is more than being still. It carries with it more of a weight of leaving undone the things that are *supposed* to be done while doing the things that ought not to be done. It has more of the force of ‘irresponsibility,’ ‘unruly living,’ and ‘disobedience.’ Thus, Paul says that this idleness is “not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” In other words, their very way of life betrays the truth of what they claim to believe.

Paul makes clear that the faith we have received, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is not simply a matter of the mind. It is a matter of the heart and stirs the will. Knowing our salvation and new life have been given to us freely and solely on account of Christ’s death and resurrection, doesn’t move us into idleness. Instead, it moves us to do the work that Christ has given us to do. It moves us to struggle with, learn, cherish, teach, guard, and defend His Word from *all* falsehood and wickedness. It moves us to repent and receive His mercy. It moves us to His compassion for others. It moves us to be one with His Body, to participate in the daily life of the Church. It moves us to gather for worship, to hear and study His Word together, to receive the Sacrament together, to break bread and live in fellowship, to pray together and for one another, to carry each other’s burdens, to serve one another in love.

Every believer is part of the Body and is called to be integrated into that Body. There is no such as a Christian who goes at it alone. A member is a member of a body because it is joined and united with the rest. A finger is a member of the body because a finger is integrated into the body. When a finger is severed, the finger and body both suffer. But it is the severed finger that is in serious trouble if it is not reintegrated back into the body. Those who confess Christ with their lips, but do not walk with the Body of Christ betray the truth they claim to believe with their actions.

It is true, salvation does not require anything of you. Christ has done it all for you. It is finished. However, as Luther is famously quoted as saying, God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does.

Your brother and sister in Christ do. Your good works are for those in this room. Young and old and in between. We are called to be together; to live together; to do the good work of the kingdom together. We all need you to make it work. Preparing the Sacrament and the sanctuary, teaching or helping with Sunday School and Midweek, joining Bible Study and contributing your thoughts, caring for the spiritual and physical needs of the congregation, helping those in need, providing opportunities to spend time together, maintaining our property and assets, supporting financially, reaching out to the community and to the world. The list goes on.

And no, not everyone can do everything, but neither can a few people do everything. We are in this together. As the forgiven and redeemed, Christ has given us work to do. And Paul says the one who has no interest in such work shouldn't be expecting to enjoy the good hospitality in the fellowship of the saints. After all, idleness is destructive. Often, when we are not busy at work, we are all too tempted to look around and complain and unnecessarily criticize those who are doing the work. Who of us hasn't complained about something that we weren't willing to help with or sought to control something that was given to someone else to do?

It's easy to complain about potholes in the parking lot, and then complain that the trustees didn't run the plans by you when they get the problem fixed. But it's not easy contacting all the contractors and getting bids and making decisions. It's easy to make comments about how you would have decorated the potluck differently. But it's not easy organizing the people and food, hauling those full trash bags out to the dumpster, or getting the dishes clean. It's always easy to criticize, but doing the work is hard.

When we simply show up, if we show up, we are not hurting God. When we criticize and manipulate, it doesn't wear God down. But it does hurt and wear down your brothers and sisters in Christ, who are seeking to imitate Christ and serve you in love. There is plenty of work to do within the Body of Christ, but being busybodies is not part of it. That doesn't build up the Body of Christ. It tears it down.

That is why Paul, encourages those Christians busy at work to not grow weary, for they are doing good. You are doing good, and God sees it and He will reward you for it. You are living out the truth that all things have been freely given to you on account of Christ and that He makes you part of His Body. Keep up the good work. Keep on doing what you are doing. As you honor the Word, you will be honored by it.

And if you feel convicted at all by this sermon, I have good news for you. First, you are forgiven! Christ's blood has covered your sin and set you free. And second, He now gives you work to do. And you can get going on it immediately. Don't know what to do? There are some tables out there in the narthex that could be a good place to start. And there are some brothers and sisters sitting in the pew with you that could probably use a little encouragement. You could start with a trustee and thank them for the work they have done on the parking lot, or a musician and thank them for leading us in song, or a member of Parish Fellowship and thank them for the wonderful work of organizing the potluck today. And if you need help identifying work beyond that, the Board of Stewardship and I would be happy to assist you in participating in the daily work and life of the Church.

As we wait for the Lord's return may we quietly be busy at work, day and night, playing our part, and integrating fully into the Body of Christ. Amen.