

“Let us run and not be weary”

November 17, 2013

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, 8 we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. 9 It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. 13 Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing.

I have this video that I want you to watch it is a song by One Direction called Shooting Stars. Please forgive the dual languages on the screen and pay attention to the English and the video depiction itself. It really made me think about the people of Thessalonica and where they were at that particular point in time.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iZYPGqMJpk>

(the original is http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT_nvWrelhg)

Interesting depiction is it not? I frankly love the subtle biblical references in the song and those are what really stuck with me as I considered this week's sermon. The lyrics of this seem to tell the story of the life of people to whom this letter was written. You see, after Christ ascended into heaven more and more people came to be aware that he was the son of the living God. Paul and the other apostles were traveling and sharing the good news and gathered followers who believed. The people who were beginning to be known as 'Christians' also continued to hope and pray for Christ to come back. Essentially the people as they were coming to know Christ were also living in an eschatological state of existence. They were always waiting for Christ to come again. Eschatology is in our theological understanding, how we understand and view death, judgment, heaven, and hell; basically the understanding of the end of days. During the time of the early Christians all lived as if the end of days was approaching.

The other thing we have to note is the weight of influence that prophecy held. The understanding of the prophetic voice has changed over the thousands of years since scripture was first written. If you recall the coming of Christ was the fulfilment of prophecy in countless ways to the Jewish people. For example, during Christmas, if you follow the lectionary, you tend to find a lot of references to the First Testament prophet Isaiah who speaks of the coming Messiah. The words of the prophets are scattered throughout out New Testament scriptures and are important to how faith was understood. We regrettably do not have the same worldview today, prophecy is not as influential, although maybe a good prophetic sermon can influence us sometimes.

Listen to the words of the song again

I see this life like a swinging vine
Swing my heart across the line
In my face is flashing signs
Seek it out and ye shall find
Old, but I'm not that old
Young, but I'm not that bold
I don't think the world is sold
I'm just doing what we're told
I feel something so right
Doing the wrong thing

I feel something so wrong
Doing the right thing
I could lie, could lie, could lie
Everything that kills me makes me feel alive

Sometimes it is downright hard to be a Christian. We walk a fine line, especially as Disciples of Christ, where we make particular choices that say a particular thing about our walks with the Lord. We as Disciples, are not particularly fanatic. I mean you will not see us knocking on peoples doors sharing our faith with those handy little "Are you saved?" pamphlets. We are just not that kind of Christian.

So I guess that begs the question what kind of Christian are we? If we remember the words of the song is it not the truth that we feel something so right doing the wrong thing because we do not have a clear definition of right or wrong outside of the teachings of Jesus. In our world today too we have every reason to say that these were words written around 3500 years ago to recall a different popular song by artist Macklemore. And do not forget that we have in our back pockets that forgiveness express card because we have been saved and confessed already our belief and we live in the knowledge that Jesus loved even the very worst of sinners.

So what kind of Christian are we? Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament, were constantly asking this question of the new Christians. Our scripture today falls in between the request for prayer and the final greetings. It is a last admonishment to the people of Thessalonica to remember what they know. These people who are new Christians are told that they ought to follow the examples set before them and never tire of doing what is right.

You know Christmas is just around the corner and we can all remember those amazing toys we received when we were younger (okay maybe just this past Christmas) and we played with them endlessly when they were new and wonderful until something else caught our attention or until the next big thing on a flashing sign came in to focus.

Most of us sitting here are not new at this Christian thing. Some of the shine has hopefully worn off of the covers of our baptismal bibles and a lot of things should be familiar to us about what it means and how being a Christian should be. But that does not mean that we set it aside for the wrong thing just because it feels good to do something different.

The passage we hear today although ostensibly for new Christians is also just as important for us old hats if not more important because the shine has worn off of the newness and we have delved into some of the depth and the questions that arise from being a Christian, particularly in our world today. You see the New Testament Christians were very much in the newness of being surrounded by people who knew Christ firsthand and had that passion and that drive to share what they knew and to believe whole heartedly in the second coming.

We however, get to live 2000 plus years later the second coming that they envisioned within a couple of lifetimes has still not been realized and so we have to view in some ways the New Testament eschatological voices as the prophetic voices of our age and our time. Prophecy, you see, is not stagnate. The reason it is prophetic is that the voices and the proclamations made resonate through the ages and are applicable to any day and age. They are always new. This book, this age old book, gives us new perspectives every time we read it, every time we hear it, every time we see it in action, and every time we do not tire of living out what is right. Amen.