

Sermon for December 14, 2008

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-24

Title: "We Have to Be Lit"

Introduction: Merry Christmas Everybody! 10 more shopping days 'til Christmas ... Is everybody ready?!? Christmas gifts purchased? Wrapped? Menus for get-togethers written out and food purchased? Great!

How many of you will spend Christmas with family or have a 'Christmas Celebration' with family from out of town or out of your house? Do you understand what I'm asking? I'm asking if you will spend significant time with relatives you do not live with in the near future.

How does that go for you? It's great spending time with family isn't it ... in limited quantity?!? I've heard it said that being a part of a family is kind of like being on Noah's Ark. The stench on the inside is only outweighed by the alternative on the outside. There is a reason that we grow up and move out!

Please don't get me wrong. It is great to be a part of a family, but it can be difficult. Sarah and I love to spend time with our families. We look forward to it every time, but after a few days ... it's good to go home and start looking forward to getting together again!

With that said, it seems like a good time to **PRAY!**

Well, as Paul wrote to the Christian Church that he started in Thessalonica (see map), Paul started writing about family too. Paul talked continually about how individuals in a church are like 'brothers'. He used the word 'brothers' over 60 times in his writings; 27 of those in his letters to the Thessalonians. Churches, to Paul, were like families. There are many similarities according to Paul and he challenged the people in the Thessalonian church to grow closer to each other as a church family.

See, Paul understood that in order for that Church to be able offer hope in the community they sat in, they had to function/work together in a way that was pleasing to God. They had to be filled by the Holy Spirit (God's Spirit of Unconditional Love) and lit up "like a city on a hill".

At this time I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will see our Scripture for today and on the other will be an outline of how we are going to approach said Scripture. My hope and prayer is that you will hear or see something today that will help you in your faith journey. I also hope that you will take time to write some notes to help remember what was said today. We may have a chance to use the Truths from this passage again some day.

Let's hear what Paul had to say at the end of his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the church in Thessalonica:

**READ 1<sup>ST</sup> THESSALONIANS 5:12-24 NOW!**

Again, Paul understood churches to be like families / Body of Christ / units that HAD TO work together in order to be what God wanted them to be! God desires to utilize churches to work at building the Kingdom of God. Churches can only have an impact on their surrounding areas for the Kingdom of God when they function the way God wants them to function.

Guess what it says here ... It says (and this is Stan's paraphrase), if we are going to be a healthy church that is usable by God, each individual needs to be able to say: "It's not about ME!"

Paul gives 5 main things that we need to be doing as a CHURCH if we are going to be effective for the Kingdom...

- I. Be Respectful of Leaders (vv. 12-13)
  - A. Now that I've said that we each need to learn to say, "It's not about me" ... This one is about me. Please understand a few things about me as your pastor.
    1. First, I would not be doing this if I had not at one time and still do sense a call from God.
    2. Second, I would not and will not ever attempt to preach without the guidance of God's Word.
    3. I understand the responsibility of what I'm doing and I know that God will hold me accountable for how I've done what He called me to do.
  - B. I will continue to put in hours of work each week to prepare messages, classes, counsel, organize and be available for weddings, baptisms, hospital calls and funerals. I will be on call 24/7 and do my best to be everywhere I can possibly be to serve the people of this congregation and community.
  - C. I will continue to try to balance my role as a leader who is "over" you and "with" you at the same time. C.S. Lewis = Think of Church as a hospital where everyone is trying to get better. The pastor is like a patient who has been in the hospital longer and knows his/her way around.
  - D. Also, I know that I'm not perfect and I will make mistakes along the way. I will do my best to admit those mistakes and keep working at getting better at what I do!
  - E. Let me read those verses again (12-13a) ... do you know how you can do all those things best? (read last sentence) "Live peaceably with each other."
    1. Whenever there is division or fights or grudges held within a church, it is usually because of selfishness.
    2. James 4 states that selfishness on the inside of the church leads to great difficulties outside of the church (it's ministry).
    3. In order to live peaceably, the ministries that happen here cannot be about any individual ... unless that individual is Jesus Christ!

Then, Paul reminds the people of the Thessalonian Church that the leaders aren't the only ones in ministry.

- II. Take Care of Each Other (vv. 14-15)
- A. If we are going to offer HOPE to the world around us ... If we are going to be a LIGHT to our community, we have to be willing to minister to each other!
- B. "Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy."
1. The meaning of this is not really that the person is always sitting on the couch with a remote in his hand; it really has more to do with being undisciplined.
  2. "Lazy" = careless or out of line. To be careless with our relationship with God and the Body of Christ (Church) hurts everyone else involved.
  3. As a runner I have found out that everything is connected. I hurt my foot about a year ago. As I continued to train for a half marathon, I found out that the compensation I had to make for my foot hurt my knee and my back too.
  4. When one member of the family is undisciplined, it affects everyone else in the family / Body of Christ.
- C. "Encourage those who are timid." Another translation is "fainthearted" or "little-souled". They don't have much soul or heart!
1. When the going gets tough, these people quit!
  2. They are always looking for the dark side of situations (glass half empty) and instead of trying to make them better, they usually start complaining!
  3. They need personal encouragement to be less negative and more positive...
- D. "Take tender care of those who are weak." These are the people in the Church Family / Body of Christ who have not yet grown strong in the Lord.
1. We need to be there for those people who are still developing their faith.
  2. Christianity is much easier to quit than to work at!
  3. Every person grows at a different rate. We tend to eat our young ... beat people up for not growing quickly in their faith... Some people have a lot of ups and downs before their faith sticks!
  4. Well, what do we do with them?!?
- E. "BE PATIENT WITH EVERYONE." Do you have any idea what great Churches we'd be at Boscobel/Mt. Zion if that was our motto?!?
1. Who are you not being patient with today?
  2. What kind of difference could you make in their lives if suddenly you were patient and understanding?
  3. Well, you'd probably be different from everyone else in their lives!

You know what?!? If we are going to be a LIGHT in this world ... if we are truly going to offer HOPE to those who feel hopeless; we have to be DIFFERENT than the rest of the world! Being PATIENT is different. So is number 3...

III. Be Thankful Always (vv. 16-18)

A. "Always be JOYFUL."

1. Please know that I am not talking about being annoying ... "morning people"!
2. What Paul is saying is that we can live our lives out with an inner joy and happiness no matter what is going on around us!
3. Wow, have I had a chance to practice this one these past few weeks...
4. This kind of deep, inner JOY only comes when we invite God's Spirit into our lives!

B. "Keep on PRAYING."

1. Have you ever tried to get to know someone without talking to them? Doesn't work!
2. Incredible miscommunications happen when we don't communicate.
3. When we don't communicate directly with another person, we get to know them through other people's perceptions.
4. How well do you know God? Not going to happen unless we are in conversation / communication!!

C. "...Always be Thankful..."

1. Got a cool e-mail this past week and the timing was good. I was in the middle of one of them there good ol' pity partys ... Really feeling sorry for myself, then I read this one:

I AM THANKFUL ... FOR THE TAXES I PAY  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I AM EMPLOYED.

FOR THE MESS TO CLEAN AFTER A PARTY  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I HAVE BEEN SURROUNDED BY FRIENDS.

FOR THE CLOTHES THAT FIT A LITTLE TOO SNUG  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT.

FOR A LAWN THAT NEEDS MOWING,  
WINDOWS THAT NEED CLEANING,  
AND GUTTERS THAT NEED FIXING  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I HAVE A HOME .

FOR ALL THE COMPLAINING  
I HEAR ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT  
BECAUSE IT MEANS WE HAVE FREEDOM OF SPEECH.

FOR THE PARKING SPOT  
I FIND AT THE FAR END OF THE PARKING LOT  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I AM CAPABLE OF WALKING  
AND I HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH TRANSPORTATION.

FOR MY HUGE HEATING BILL  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I AM WARM.

FOR THE LADY BEHIND ME IN CHURCH WHO SINGS OFF KEY BECAUSE IT MEANS  
I CAN HEAR.

FOR THE PILE OF LAUNDRY AND IRONING  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I HAVE CLOTHES TO WEAR.

FOR THE ALARM THAT GOES OFF  
IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS  
BECAUSE IT MEANS I AM ALIVE.

**ARE WE ALWAYS THANKFUL?** It is God's will for you who belong to Jesus Christ!

IV. Be Careful in Worship (vv. 19-21)

- A. "Worship is the most important activity of a local church family. Ministry must flow out of worship, otherwise it becomes busy activity without power and without heart." (The Bible Exposition Commentary)
1. Worship is important to us and even more important to God.
  2. Worship needs to be a priority in our lives if we are going to be followers of Jesus Christ ... we are to meet regularly (weekly) and realize that we are in this together.
  3. This is our chance to meet with God together.
- B. "Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good."
1. In Paul's day, the Church did not have the full Scripture the way we do. The preachers and teachers had little to work with, so they relied heavily on God's Spirit to speak to them.
  2. The problem was that there could be some real inconsistencies. Some churches were learning one thing and another the opposite ... who was right?!?
  3. They had to test what they learned and hold on to what was good or of God.
- C. I would challenge you to do the same here ... test that what I say is of God.
1. I always preach from Scripture, but I sometimes say things that are not quite right or are unclear ... let me know.
  2. I need to keep improving too!
- D. At the same time, hear the beginning of this section ... "Do not stifle the Holy Spirit". In other words, if you know what I'm saying is God's Word and Truth ... DO IT!
- E. The purpose of Worship is that we might become more like Jesus Christ in the way we live and in who we are... It's supposed to really make a difference!

V. Be Faithful Daily (vv. 22-24)

- A. Now that we've worshipped, how will it change you from the inside out and how will you act the other 167 hours of the week?
- B. We are to be "holy in every way" and "blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again."
  - 1. We love talking about a LOVING God that we get to worship.
  - 2. We love talking about a FORGIVING God that offers unlimited Grace.
  - 3. We don't like talking about a HOLY God that has high expectations of us.
- C. We have an opportunity here in the Boscobel / Mt. Zion area to reach many for Jesus Christ ... IF we will be the Church that God calls us to be!
- D. We can only be HOPE and LIGHT if we live our lives the way God calls us to. That means individually as well as part of the Family of God, brothers and sisters.
- E. Will we be light?!?

Next Week: What are you willing to do for Jesus Christ ... really?!?

Let's Pray!