

Sermon 3rd and 4th Nov 07
David Jones
2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

What keeps you going? Where do you get the energy from to get up in the morning? What about when you face set backs? Do you have little slogans to help, like, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going"? We need motivation in life. Psychologists tell us motivation can be either negative or positive, the avoidance of pain, or the reward of something we like.

My son and his family are living with us at the moment and I notice child rearing techniques seem to have changed from when I was first a dad. I used to give a light smack with a rod; but smacking is out. Its interesting to watch as my son and his wife discipline their little boys. They are very patient and give them a lot of time, and they are good boys.

My own observation is that people there is no need to push people or try and force them; rather we are normally motivated to do things we like to use our talents in creative ways. No one naturally likes to do nothing all the time. People will move forward positively, unless they are constantly discouraged. I do not have to motivate those of you who love a challenge, who love to use your God given gifts.

And faith in the future, faith in God's future can be a great force to keep us looking forward.

When Paul wrote his two letters to the Thesslonians, the church in this part of Greece, in the city of Thessalonika, was a young, very enthusiastic, but as yet imperfectly instructed, church. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to help address their lack of instruction. We meet different kinds of people in this church: the weak and the faint-hearted, the idlers and the workers, the visionaries and the puzzled.¹

I will leave you as rector of St Thomas' in three months time. As I enter these last three months amongst you I have begun to reflect upon your strengths, just as Paul does here. He is so proud of them because their faith is growing abundantly. It has been a joy for me to work amongst you these past seven years because of your faith. I thank God for your faith and your faithfulness. During the more difficult times, as well as the good times, your faith has shone through and kept you going.

The other thing I thank God for, as Paul did in his letter to the Thessalonians, is your love. St Thomas' is a church with a great deal of gentleness and love. It is a joy to serve God and his kingdom with you, and I am constantly encouraged by your warmth and genuineness towards others.

¹ Leon Morris [1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) 19

The Thessalonians were steady in their faith despite all the hard times. Trouble refines. Trouble is not the enemy I have discovered this in my journey through life, with Jesus.

When I came to Port Macquarie it was in answer to a clear call from God and I am now being called to a quite challenging parish missionary situation in Melbourne. After I announced that I had accepted a call to Melbourne a number of you expressed yourself to me as you left the church. One member who has been here many years said as they left the church, "I haven't had time to put my thoughts and feelings into words," and then they paused and added, "Thank you for helping us to grow."

Growth in maturity in our faith is important. I have learned that trouble is not the enemy. Paul says in verse 5, **"All this trouble is a clear sign that God has decided to make you fit for the kingdom."** There was a song that came out from John Wimber's Vineyard movement, "Refiner's fire" that expressed something of this. In the Middle Ages a doctrine of Purgatory developed. It was thought that there was a time for Christians to be purged of their sins, between death and the next resurrection age. As the Bible does not clearly teach this doctrine, the Anglican Church rather teaches that the process of purging or refining begins in this life.

In the midst of the challenges of life, the comfort Paul offers is this. Jesus will return one day. Jesus will come back and put all wrongs to right. There is a strong note of judgement here in this letter. What happens when those who refuse God, die? It is not a nice subject to talk about. I hear people, even some church leaders, say that there will not be punishment. How can there be, for a loving God?

Judgement is a clear theme of the Bible, strongly so in the teaching of Jesus. Interestingly Paul does not here speak of hell. Hell is a place of ongoing torment, but Paul does not mention it. Let me read from the Message version, verses 8-9, **"Those who refuse to know God and refuse to obey the message will pay for what they've done. Eternal exile from the presence of the Master and his splendid power is their sentence."**

I suspect that God will honour our choice. Those people who want to have nothing to do with God in this life, he will allow to have nothing to do with him in the next! We recoil from warnings of judgement, and we know how easily such language can be abused, and has been abused by those in authority down through the ages. But judgement is the necessary 'other side' of justice; and if God is not interested in justice, then the whole Christian understanding, including that of Jesus himself, is deeply mistaken.

There are big issues here, aren't there?

We look forward to the future because it is God's future. There is an extraordinary day ahead. When Jesus returns he will be exalted by his followers and celebrated by all who believe.

Sometimes Christians get a bad name because there are those who seem to force their opinions upon others. Force is not God's way. Because Jesus will return we can be a positive people, open to the future, prepared for the opportunities that arise. I am going to an area of Melbourne where there are people of other faiths, including many Muslims. I hope to have the opportunity to make friends with these people.

I spoke to Jim Wallace a week ago when he was in Port Macquarie. He was a colonel in the Australian Army SAS, head of the counter terrorism unit. He is a Christian and felt led to head up the Australian Christian Electoral Lobby. He believes the only way forward with people of different faiths is through dialogue. We should respect other views. There are 400,000 Muslims in Australia and these present Christians with a great opportunity! We don't have to go as missionaries to Pakistan or Indonesia if we want to serve God amongst Muslims.

We are not called to interfere in the lives of others, but we are called to love and serve them. Once you have made friends with someone. Isn't it natural to want to share important things with them? We can invite others to consider the claims of Jesus and then if they respond, to join us on the journey.

What keeps you going?

It is wonderful being in a church where we are all encouraging one another in our walk, as we seek to follow Jesus faithfully. Last week I attended one of the home bible study groups, because it was the leader's birthday. It is a wonderful group, encouraging members, as we look to Jesus.

There is energy and wonder in realizing that it is all just ahead of us. As we grow older it is possible to become cynical, to give up, to say "I've seen it all." **"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"** says the Teacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

But Paul says to the believers in the church at Thessalonika, in verse 11 ***"Because we know this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray that our God will make you fit for what he's called you to be, pray that he'll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something."***

My great motivation is to make a difference. And we make a difference not just in what we do, but the integrity we show in how we do it.

Because Jesus will return we can be a positive people open to the future, open and prepared. Jesus did not tell us to plan so much as to be prepared. As events unfold, God's hand is always at work. We can always be looking forward to the opportunities God gives.

PRAYER Heavenly Father I pray that you will make these your people fit for what you have called each to be; that you will fill their good ideas and creative acts of faith with your energy, Lord, so what each person does will amount to something. In Jesus' name. **AMEN**