

Sermon 2 Thessalonians 3  
17/18 Nov 2007  
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Where do you live your life? We can live our lives mainly in the past. We can live in the present, or we can have our outlook mainly towards the future.

The past is important and memory is a big part of our lives, isn't it? Its good to celebrate the milestones. My wife turns 60 next week and one of the reasons for the Parish Bush Dance on 30<sup>th</sup> November is so we can celebrate with Gretta this milestone.

The future is also important and as we have been looking at 2 Thessalonians there has been a strong sense of the future. Faith in the future, God's future, can be a force to keep us on track in the present, can't it? These past two weeks we have seen how Paul explained to the church in Thessalonika that Jesus will return. Trouble and hard times now can be better endured as we anticipate being with the Lord.

As I read the Bible and seek God it seems to me that God wants us to live in the present. Both the past and the future can help us live in the right way in the present. 2 Thess 3:13 **"Never tire of doing what is right."** If we live too much in the past, or too much in the future, we will miss what God is doing now.

During this past week I have been doing some things for the last time and that has meant I am beginning to say goodbye. On Monday the Anglican clergy in the region met to farewell Gretta and me. I have been the Regional Ministry Co-ordinator for this region which goes from Wauchope to SW Rocks and it was good to meet one last time. Then on Tuesday morning I spoke to the Ladies Fellowship. I spoke about saying goodbye, and looked in particular at the way Jesus said goodbye and the way the apostle Paul did.

People say goodbye in different ways. Some just say it and go. Others linger. Jesus sent out many signals about his going, and the disciples ignored them and didn't really know what to do with them. They did not want to let him go.

I once heard it said that the way we say goodbye is also the way we will die. On Tuesday we discussed how much we prepare for our own death.

Jesus taught us to be prepared and our attitude to the future can be seen here. It is good to be prepared. I believe one of my important tasks as your minister has been to help you do that, so that each of you can be prepared for a good death. If you are young, then you probably won't give your actual death much thought, however as you learn to see things from the perspective of heaven, as your faith develops, so you are being prepared for a good death.

Being a Christian for me is above all about faith, faith in a good God, faith in what he has done for you in the past especially through Jesus and his death, faith in the future that he is preparing for you, and faith in the present. Right now God is actually able to bring good change into your life.

When I visit the sick I sometimes get the sense that God wants to heal them now, and so I ask them if they would like me to pray. God says in the Bible, **"I am the Lord who heals you."** Healing is one aspect of what God wants to do for you now. Jesus came to change things, and that means to change us, for the better.

Being a Christian makes a difference. It can make a difference to every part of your life.

God wants our life to be a life of faith. That means to let him in to every part of your life. God will think of ways of surprising you. Yet he wants you to learn to trust him with every part of your life, what you think, what you say, and what you do, and in all your relationships.

Sometimes the past can include bitter experiences. Our present can be invaded in a bad way by the past, when we don't let the past go. The word "forgiveness" in the language of the Bible literally means "to let go." To forgive means to let go of the right of revenge, but there is a general sense of living the Christian life in the freedom that comes from not holding onto unnecessary baggage from the past. One of the reasons I want this time of saying goodbye to be done in the right way, is that too often people leave badly and so make it harder for both themselves and others to move on to the new thing God wants to do in our lives.

2 Thess 3:16 Paul writes, **"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way."** The Message version translates this, May he **"give you the gift of getting along with each other at all times, in all ways."**

As we begin to think about our move from this parish to Melbourne people ask me how I feel. It is hard to give a full answer. A move brings with it some uncertainty. What does the future hold? I do not find it easy to say goodbye and to let go – although I can preach it! I do get excited by the future. I like meeting

new people, and I can always see possibilities. Your future here is full of new possibilities isn't it? Both on Church Hill and with the new developments in western Port Macquarie at Trinity.

Paul writes to the church in 2 Thess 3:1 **"Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may take off and bring a great response."** This is a privilege we share today in Australia. We are entering new uncharted waters. Bishop Keith Slater here in the Diocese of Grafton is encouraging fresh expressions and new ways of connecting with the world again. After we leave you and move to Melbourne I'll continue to have this privilege in the context of a large growing modern city: to tell the ever new story of Jesus in ways that let more people hear it, be excited by it and respond to it. This all needs prayer. I will continue to pray for you and ask you to pray for us.

As we look to the future, we are also reminded by Paul about the present. God's word calls us to live our lives in right relationships with others in the present, to learn what it means to live each day now by faith, and with Paul in Galatians 2 to be able to say, **"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."** It is not up to me. It is not up to you. When Christ lives in us we can effectively in the present. **"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave his life for me."**