

Do Not Be Weary  
Rev. Nicole Farley  
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**2 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

6 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. <sup>7</sup>For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup>and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. <sup>9</sup>This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. <sup>10</sup>For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. <sup>11</sup>For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. <sup>12</sup>Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

**Luke 21:5-19**

5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, <sup>6</sup>'As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.'

7 They asked him, 'Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?' <sup>8</sup>And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them.

9 'When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.' <sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; <sup>11</sup>there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.

12 'But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. <sup>13</sup>This will give you an opportunity to testify. <sup>14</sup>So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; <sup>15</sup>for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. <sup>16</sup>You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>You will be hated by all because of my name. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Last week, we were encouraged by 2 Thessalonians to stand firm and hold fast. "Stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught," the author writes. Every writing, whether it be the gospels or the epistles or the book of Isaiah or L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series or even Dr. Seuss' books, every writing is written with a very specific context in mind and, likewise, a specific group of hearers. Of course, this epistle, this letter, is no different. As we gathered from our reading last week, the believers in Thessalonica were beginning to slack off. It had been many years since Jesus had said he would return and they figured the time had to be getting near, especially because people were writing them telling them it was the case. And so, they began to get a little (in some cases, a lot) lax about

sharing the gospel and about living the gospel, which meant to them, in part, living in community, supporting one another.

These lax folk are the “believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received.” Current scholarly thought is that “idleness” is more rightly translated as “disorderliness.” An order for living in community had been set forth, the tradition of which the author writes, a tradition which was taught, a tradition which was received. These people who believed Jesus was coming any day had figured this tradition had outlived its usefulness. These were people who **could** work but chose not to. Because they were living in a community where resources were shared, that meant that others had to work extra to support them. Not cool, not cool at all. Even then, as a civilized society, there were social norms; in this case, new social norms had developed around the understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Christ. Those who follow the social norms aren’t particularly thrilled when some choose not to.

I don’t know about you but I know for myself, there have been times when this thought has crossed my mind: if they’re not going to, why should I bother? I think the author’s exhortation works two ways. For those who might be thinking like I have on occasion, do not be weary in doing what is right. And for those who were already taking advantage of the hard work of others, do not be weary in doing what is right. When the author says “keep away from believers who are living in idleness,” the suggestion is not to shun them. That, too, would be antithetical to the gospel. No, the suggestion mimics admonitions throughout the history of the Israelite people. Stay away from those who are not like you because they might sway you into thinking, acting, believing like they do. It wasn’t because of an inherent badness in others but because of our inherent weakness to chase after what is more appealing, what seems easier, what we like over and against what God desires.

We know that “the other” isn’t inherently bad. And, if for some reason we weren’t sure, we have a Bible filled with examples of the “foreigner” who showed what was right in God’s eyes, who behaved in a way in which God would approve. Ruth with Naomi. The Good Samaritan. Rahab. So, “keep away” means keep your hearts and minds away from those who would encourage you to live in a way that does not fit Christ’s example. Another way to hear “do not be weary in doing what is right” is “be strong in doing what is right.” As the author says, “you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us,” your examples in faith. **We** know how we ought to act from the earliest examples of faith to the hundreds who have come through the following years.

The letter of 2 Thessalonians warns of those who would falsely state the end was near and so does Jesus’ narrative in our reading from Luke. Whereas 2 Thessalonians focused on the tendency of people to lose focus near the end, Jesus raises up the potential of people at the end. What sounds truly

awful, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plagues, arrests, persecution, that awful presents an opportunity. He says, “This will give you an opportunity to testify.” When everything is going to hell, literally, we have an opportunity. Beyond not wearying in doing what is right, beyond maintaining a stable way of living, we have an opportunity to step it up. We might use a phrase like “be the bigger man.” Being the bigger man, in this case, when the world is against us, means not only refusing to back down on our beliefs, but living even more so into the song which goes “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

We know, from the news, and from our own experiences, that the church has been declining. My Facebook wall is filled with links to articles from my colleagues talking about why millennials don’t come to church, dissecting what a traditional church can do to reach out to seekers, how to attract the “nones,” the people who, when asked what their religious affiliation is, say “none”. In all of these readings runs a theme of reasons why people don’t come to church. A common theme is that the church is irrelevant. Equally common is the idea that the church is hypocritical. We sit here each week, and hopefully in your daily reading of the Bible, too, and find this ancient text to be relevant here and now. If we look irrelevant, perhaps it is because we are hesitant to tell others how relevant it is for us.

As for hypocritical, I, as I’m sure you do, work hard at “talking the talk AND walking the walk.” Sometimes I don’t do such a great job. Sometimes I do. A hypocrite, according to Merriam-Webster is “a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs.”<sup>1</sup> Believers have been hypocrites from the very beginning. David claimed to worship God and desired to follow God’s ordinances and yet David is the same one who took another man’s wife and sent the man into warfare to be killed. Ananais and Sapphira claimed to be giving all of the proceeds of the sale of their land to the apostles but they held some back. Over and over and over again we do what we want instead of what God wants and yet we believe and have faith in God. Does it make me sad that people can rightly call us hypocrites? Yes, it really does. And not just those people who, under the name of Christianity, do terrible things, but us on our not so very good days. Mine usually come on the highway, but not always.

The thing is, though, that wherever those doubters got their information was wrong. We never claimed not to be hypocrites; in fact, the church is exactly a place for hypocrites and liars and the selfish and the spiteful – let no one be fooled. Jesus said “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”<sup>2</sup> We are welcomed and we are called exactly as we are, even if that means we aren’t perfect, especially if that means we aren’t perfect,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hypocrite>, 16 November 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 2:17.

especially if we want to do better than we already do, if we want to follow Jesus more closely. This, this, is the good news of the gospel. While we were sinners, that means now, too, Christ died for us. Because we have faith in him, we dare to approach God with confidence, assured of a forgiveness already given through Christ. That forgiveness is extended to us. That forgiveness is extended to those who would call us hypocrites as if they might not be as broken, or as if they don't aim to a higher moral standard and fail to meet it, too.

When people are hateful but call themselves believers, do not let them weary you but, instead, be renewed in doing right. When people call you hateful things, do not let them weary you but, instead, be renewed in doing right. When you disappoint yourself, do not let that weary you but, instead, know that you are forgiven and try again. We cannot change others' ways of thinking; they need to do that for themselves. Go out and do something that gives them reason to question their previous thinking. Even if their thought does not change, do not be weary in doing what is right. In the midst of what seems awful, you have an opportunity to testify with your life. Do not be weary in doing what is right.

Let us pray: Holy God, give us strength to do what is right, we pray. Amen.