

## **“An Example To All”**

### **I Thessalonians 1:1-10**

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father  
and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you  
and mention you in our prayers, constantly  
remembering before our God and Father your work of faith  
and labor of love and steadfastness of hope  
in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God,  
that God has chosen you, because our message of the gospel  
came to you not in word only, but also in power  
and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;  
just as you know what kind of persons  
we proved to be among you for your sake.

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord,  
for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy  
inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became  
an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you  
not only in Macedonia and Achaia,  
but in every place your faith in God has become known,  
so that we have no need to speak about it.

For the people of those regions report about us  
what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you  
turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,  
and to wait for his Son from heaven,  
whom he raised from the dead —Jesus,  
who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

## **An Example To All**

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

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### **I.**

Have you been reading the news of late? Are you aware of what is happening in the world and, here, in our own nation? Holy cow, I have to tell you, I don't even know *what* to say to you this morning. Or, what possibly *could* be said. Or, if it is worth saying anything *at all*. And, yet, it seems necessary to at least *try* to speak, if only as a means of acknowledgment; even as we know full well that doing so will fall *far* short of anything which is in any way proper, or pertinent, or persuasive.

While some (if not many) would make the case that talking of these things during the worship service is somehow inappropriate, I would counter that if we cannot talk about these things here among our sisters and brothers in faith, or chose not to do so, then what is the point of being a church and having a faith? No, not *all* the time; but, sometimes, when required, compelled, or called to do so. Now is certainly such a time.

### **II.**

At least that is how I feel about it, because, I can assure you, talking about this is about the *last* thing I want to do this morning. The truth is, I am right there with you. Not only do we not what to *talk* about it, most of us do not even want to *think* about it. We have *more* than enough to do, just getting through our days, juggling all of the things we must: making a living, raising kids, staying engaged, tending to our physical and emotional well-being, looking after our own health, devoting time and energy to the things and people we care about and, all the while, trying to secure for ourselves some small bit of leisure, or fun, or whimsy that allows us to feel that everything else we must do is worth it. And it is, of course; worth it, I mean. Beyond that, however, there is precious little of us left to consider the pain and anguish of the world beyond our own lives or to muster the strength, or belief, that we can actually do anything about it.

### III.

If you have been following along, you will have noticed my sermons tend emphasize all the good things that are happening here in our church and in the lives of those in our congregation and this family of faith (and there are a *ton* of them). This is not a means of avoiding all the bad in the world, it is an effort to remind us that the good *is* still possible; and, if that we can do it here, everybody everywhere can do it, too. Even in the ancient tinderbox and crucible that is the Middle East.

We are all aghast and deeply troubled by what has recently taken place in Israel, and is occurring right now in Gaza; and rightly so. The diabolically planned killing of innocents? Barbarism? Hostage taking? A million people told to evacuate with nowhere for them to go? Cut off from water, food, and medical supplies? Decades of neglect and indignity? Desperation? Armies massing? How does this happen? Where did it begin? How, possibly, can it end?

### IV.

The savagery and misery is *beyond* measure, and startling in the ways it propagates itself and the speed with which it spreads. A 6 year old boy in Joliet, Illinois is stabbed 26 times and dies simply because he is muslim and of Palestinian descent? Not only does it boggle the mind, it eviscerates the soul, and lays waste to the heart. With thousands upon thousands of rockets, mortars and artillery salvos being hurled, by *both* sides, is it really so surprising that one of them lands on a hospital killing hundreds of people who wished nothing more than not to die? All the while the game of “Us verses Them” continues to build to the inevitable, but still shocking conclusion such that we have now lost a sense of “we”; or that there ever was such a thing, as neighbors, fellow citizens, or servants of a noble nation. Moreover, all this is just the tip of very large iceberg with Ukraine, the economy, unprecedented weather events, and countless other lurid things lurking just below the surface of our lives.

### V.

To be clear, I in no way mean for this sermon to be “political.” Instead, I hope that speaking to these things, while political in nature, might pave the way for a clearer theological understanding of why we believe what we believe

and, more to the point, why we do what we do. That is to say, the example we set.

Today's scripture reading from I Thessalonians is, at first glance (how to say this) rather *ordinary*. At least that is what I surmised when I first reviewed the passage this week. Upon reconsideration, however, I have to admit that against the backdrop of events playing out on the international and national stages, "ordinary" seem pretty darn good to me; yes siree Bob.

## **VI.**

Here, in the letter's first chapter, Paul gives thanks for the church for their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, right on, huh? These folks are *DOING* it; and Paul is all too happy to let them know all about it.

Which, really, is the very same goal I have for today's sermon preached, here, among all of you. Whatever role you play here at our church, whatever actions you take, whatever gifts you share, whatever thoughts you hold, kindness you show or time you spend, whatever hope you maintain, whatever prayers you offer, whatever love you give, whatever gentleness you are able to gift, whatever leadership you lend, whatever connection you have to this place, and these people, however far away you live, whatever faith you muster, every single bit of it, larger or small, is all making a stunningly, extra-ordinary impact on our world. You, *all* of you, are *DOING* it.

## **VII.**

Here then, specifically, is *what* you are doing: you are setting an *example*. Paul says: *You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution (hardship) you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.*

While Paul may have felt it unnecessary to speak to others about the good work of the Thessalonian church, he absolutely needed to speak to the church, itself, just as I am speaking to you today about *your* good work in our church as a congregation.

## **VIII.**

We read in the news of far too many tragic and horrible events and find ourselves shaking our heads in disbelief at the state of the world, the machinations of our own government, and the misery of so many, and wonder to ourselves when will it ever end?

While God only knows *when* it will end, God has certainly told us *how* it will end. By brothers and sisters beloved and chosen by God, turning from the ancient but ever-present idols of ideology which give rise to the worship of violence, hate, falsehood, alienation and fear and, instead, turn to serve a living and true God made known to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do so not with words alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction to welcome others, to feed the sheep, to bind up wounds and heal the broken hearted, to forgive as freely as we have been forgiven, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to rejoice in the Lord *always*, even and especially in the midst of doom and despair, as we wait for the Son from heaven, whom God raised from the dead —Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming...and is already here.

## **IX.**

Finally, this weekend we held our annual Fall Bazaar here at the church. An occasion and opportunity to extend a welcome to the community, to give of ourselves for that which is beyond ourselves, to bask in the riotous fun which (apparently) comes in being a family of faith (who knew?) to break bread with neighbors and friends, to bolster the church coffers, to share ourselves and get to know one another, and to set as an example to all about the power and peace which comes from being quite ordinary in believing that the good is still possible. Praise the Lord, thank you Jesus. Amen.