

Dear friends,

This week we shall be focusing on Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians in which he is heavily critical of those who believed that Jesus had already returned and therefore so no point in working and who, instead, relied on the church to feed them!! Paul was not pleased!

I hope that you are doing as well as you would hope and, as always, I keep you in my thoughts and prayers. With every blessing, Margaret.

Call to worship:

Father, as we come before you now, draw us closer – lead us deeper – challenge us more – and equip us to live for you now in whatever way you need us. Amen.

The Lord is King! Earth be glad!

Rejoice! Rejoice!

God rules with righteousness and justice.

Lord, Almighty, you are ruler of all the earth.

We remember what you have done and we give you thanks and now we come to worship you. Amen.

God of spring and summer, autumn and winter – we adore you.

God of past and present and times to come – we adore you.

God of the darkest night and the brightest day – we adore you.

God of love and peace and hope and joy – we adore you.

God of all times and all places – we adore you.

The words to 'Lord of all hopefulness' written by Jan Struther [Joyce Placzek] 1901-1953 StF 526

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

2 Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

3 Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

4 Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Prayer and Lord's Prayer:

Infinite God, we give thanks and praise that we can glimpse you in the beauty of Temple or church, in the glitz, sparkle and beauty of fine things.

Thank you that we can be transported in our minds by your Holy Spirit to see beyond this moment and this place, to see your purpose and your meaning and to know your desires for us.

Thank you that we can see you in the midst of confusion and anguish, when your Spirit lights the way and calms our fears.

Thank you that we can know you in rest and in busyness – in work and play – in solitude and in community.

Thank you for helping us to know how we should live now, to the glory of your great name. Amen.

Lord, I am sorry if ever I have missed the point of being a Christian.

I am sorry if I have wavered in my faith, wandered from the path and followed the wrong group.

I am sorry, God, if I have caused hurt and pain to those who love me.

I'm sorry, God, if I have been lazy in my faith and in my witness to you.

Lord, I am sorry for all of this and I ask you to forgive me. Amen.

The Almighty God, who never fails us, hears our prayers, our confession, and our sorrow and gives us now the assurance that our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13: taken from The Holy Bible, Easy-read-version. [Copyright 2006 by World Bible Translation Center Inc – and used by permission]

This is headed: the Obligation to Work.

Brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ we tell you to stay away from any believer who refuses to work. People that refuse to work are not following the teaching that we gave them. You yourselves know that you should live as we do. We were not lazy when we were with you. We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked and worked so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We worked night and day. We had the right to ask you to help us, but we worked to take care of ourselves so that we would be an example for you to follow. When we were with you we gave you this rule: "whoever will not work should not be allowed to eat."

We hear that some people in your group refuse to work. They are doing nothing except being busy in the lives of others. Our instruction to them is to stop bothering others, to start working and earn their own food. It is by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are urging them to do this. Brothers and sisters never tire of doing good.

Comment:

One of the consequences of the rumour that the day of the Lord has already arrived[2 Thessalonians 2:2] is that some of Christ's followers are breaking with the church's orderly life by opting to live in idleness, suggesting that these believers see working for a living as a mundane distraction from more glorious, heavenly experiences of the salvation that has now arrived. Surely, they would say, there are enough wealthy people in the church to support those who use all their time to witness to the arrival of God's salvation!

Some versions of this read the Greek *ataktws* as meaning ‘in a disorderly way’ here – an unruly way of life disrupts the church’s orderly living by showing undue interest in other people’s business. Either way, the rumour unsettles the church’s well-being.

Paul sees himself and his co-workers as models of how to live faithful, Christ-like lives by refusing to be a burden to others – though Paul believes that he could have claimed financial support from a church he founded. Those who are living idle or disorderly lives are being drawn away from the traditional apostolic teaching into the realms of what we today might call ‘fake truth’. Hence Paul’s sharp reminder: ‘anyone unwilling to work should not eat’. [Similar sayings are found in many places with the Book of Proverbs].

This is a specific address to misguided believers in his own day, not a general rule for those who are unemployed or sick or destitute through no fault of their own. In the early Church widows came into this category and Paul was quite clear that older widows should be able to rely on the church to support them, while younger widows should re-marry in accordance with Roman law. [1 Timothy 5:9ff] Rather than being a burden, Paul insists that all believers should invest their energies in the church’s good.

In contrast to individualistic emphases, the importance of the common life is essential to the church as the people of God. The call here is to work quietly without wearying in doing what is right. This is a word spoken to all in the church. Disorderliness will not build up the church in demanding times. Or might it be possible that some in the church just wanted to play by their own rules and desires? They knew the way of life handed down in the tradition, but they wanted to live differently. Group codes can become very unimaginative and seem uncreative in new circumstances. But no community exists without some shared standards and goals.

Are the Thessalonians facing the perennial question of how we live responsibly in community? Individualism is no answer – but neither is uncreative tradition. Least helpful of all are those who disregard their responsibilities to others altogether.

When life seems bleak – taken from Sermon Illustrations written by David Adam. Copyright 2005,2006,2007,2011 David Adam.

Life was often bleak for the people who lived in the Hebrides. Sometimes the future did not seem to hold any promise and when the mists came down it did not help. Here is an affirmation prayer that faces the reality of the cheerless day but also a much deeper reality of the love of God and our future in him.

‘Though the dawn breaks cheerless on this isle today,
my spirit walks in a path of light.

For I know my greatness.

Thou hast built me a throne within thy heart.

I dwell safely within the circle of thy care.

I cannot for a moment fall out of thine everlasting arms.

I am on my way to thy glory.’

Alistair Maclean, Hebridean Altars

Prayer:

Great God, your glory hovers over the face of our earth and we catch glimpses of it in creation’s colours.

You are the God who involves us in your grace-full purposes calling us to share in your love for the world and its people; enabling us to do great things that enhance the living of our neighbours. This day we declare that, as your children, following in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth, we shall endeavour, in the strength of your Spirit, to make the kingdom more visible around us – to speak with the tongue of prophet and to caress a weary world with our enthusiasm. Amen.

The words to ‘teach me, my God and King’ written by George Herbert [1593-1633]

StF 668

1 Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything,
to do it as for thee.

2 For those who look on glass
on it may stay the eye;
or if it pleases, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

3 All may of thee partake:
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, ‘For thy sake’
will not grow beight and clean.

4 A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine;
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.

5 This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch and own
cannot for less be told.

Close:

Send us out to be your eyes and ears.
Send us out to be your hands and feet.
Send us to work and not to shirk.
Send us out to live and love for you – now and always!
Amen.

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