

Scripture**2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13****(NRSVUE)**

⁶ Now we command you, siblings, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister living irresponsibly and not according to the tradition that they received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not irresponsible when we were with you, ⁸ 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. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living irresponsibly, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ Siblings, do not be weary in doing what is right.

Picking up leaves in the fall is a task that requires devotion to keeping it up. It's a job that I'm really glad is done by others for me currently, but I also must confess that I actually kind of *enjoyed* the whole process: not only is it great being out in the fresh air this time of year, but there's also something very satisfying for me about getting the yard all cleaned up and ready for the winter! That said, however, I also have to say that I have not *always* felt that way; in fact, I'm here to tell you that as a kid I actively worked to avoid the task of leaf raking altogether!

I believe that most of us do come to appreciate the importance, value, and essential nature of work; and *not* just because it results in much-needed sustenance! Because work can actually be a blessing, a gift of God. Work is a means to use our God-given gifts to serve both God and neighbor, and as a way to provide for those we love. It can also be a great source of joy and personal fulfillment. And work is often the way we meet people and establish meaningful relationships. Whether the work is that which we do on the job, or in our vocation as a spouse, a parent, a neighbor, *or* if we're simply that breed of person who's a "putterer," the fact is, the work we do goes a long way in defining who we are.

We *also* learn, especially as we grow, that a lot of our work may not always be fun or glamorous, but ultimately comes down simply to *doing what needs to be done and growing in well-doing*. In a whole lot of circumstances of life, we come to understand that there are times we dare not stand idle for very long, because waiting for tomorrow to do the work of today may prove not only to be disastrous, but also too late.

Sometimes, the time for well-being work is NOW.

That's what our text for this morning is all about. We hear some admittedly pretty harsh words coming from the pen of the Apostle Paul and directed to the church in the city of Thessalonica, which was (and is) located in Macedonia in northern Greece. Well, recalling last week's reading: apparently the Christians in Thessalonica had come to anticipate the "second coming" of Christ at literally any moment. For them, the kingdom of God was immediately at hand, and because of this, many of them took on an attitude that all activity was unnecessary and irrelevant. In essence, their feeling was that if Christ were coming soon, why bother?

As a result, many in that city had quit their jobs, they stopped participating in the life of the community, and they generally just sat around waiting for something to happen. And as the weeks and months passed without Christ having returned, these Christians had pretty much dropped out of society and were living off the work of others in order to survive! It was this kind of behavior that was destroying the very fabric of the new church. In their idleness, you see, they'd forgotten the true meaning of their faith; and therein, the well-doing in God's kingdom that they were being called to.

So, when Paul writes to them about this, his tone is anything but conciliatory; in fact, it's rather blunt: he says they are ***"mere busybodies, not doing any work and yet still expect to be fed!"*** You *dare not stand idle*, for you are the people ***called out to live out*** the reality of Christ's presence, love and, salvation in this world, ***and*** to do so until that time when Christ returns; this is your vocation as Christians, *it's your job*. So, *"go to work quietly, earn your keep, put food on your own table... supply your own necessities,"* and above all, ***"do not be weary of doing what is right."***

What Paul is saying here is that at the end of the day, if we are followers of Christ – that is, if our identity is to be found in the Jesus-way – then that identity will grow in our well-doing of love and justice and peace and hope done in Christ's name.

As the church, we are the people of God's promised kingdom, people who live in expectation of Christ's coming; and the thing about this is that the work of preparation for that coming is to be done NOW. We are called not to procrastinate.

Now maybe this all seems rather obvious to you. I realize, after all we are here out of a faith in God that informs and directs our daily lives. Moreover, some of us have come here today to discern or maybe even answer God's call for our life and living, to find purpose and empowerment for the living of our days. So, there's no question that, where faith is concerned, there's well-being work to be done!

And yet, the questions that Paul would have us ask is whether ...

- Do we seek to truly live the example of Jesus with devoted hearts and outstretched hands?
- Do our day-to-day lives end showing the world that we've grown tired of doing what we know?
- *Do we stand idle* while God's work is just waiting to be done?

Because, friends, the hard truth is that the church stands in the midst of crucial times, facing challenges unlike any of those faced by generations before us by...

- Seeking to give our children a clear sense of moral, ethical, and deeply spiritual practices for their lives, even as contrary forms of human behavior are being paraded daily
- Recognizing spirituality as one of the most integral parts of our health, wholeness, and personal growth; and yet, expressing that faith increasingly seems inappropriate and even foolish in current culture.
- Living in a world where all too often the cries of the sick and the hungry and those ravaged by the effects of hatred and war go unheard while those in the seats of power seem all too focused on maintaining their power!

If there's ever been a time for the church of Jesus Christ to **be** the church of Jesus Christ, it's NOW and that's as true for us individually as it is collectively.

What's tragic to me, friends, is that we *know* what's right and what's good as regards our faith; as I am fond of saying, it's not what we don't understand about our faith that gets to us, it's what we *do* understand. You and I are called by God to be about the business of God's kingdom: in our homes, in the marketplaces, in the places that shape the priorities of society and culture. But so often it seems that at every level many are wearied of doing what they know is right. And what Paul says to the Thessalonians, he says to us as well: as Christians, we simply cannot be caught standing idle with so much of God's well-being work is to be done!

God has created *us* that we might lead lives of integrity, doing the work that God has laid out for us to do. That's who *we* are, that's what we're meant to be as the children of God: to go out into the world and actively do the well-being work that God intends for us to do. Anything else would defeat God's whole purpose for us!

Siblings in Christ, we need to get to that work and grow our well-being as God has intended for us. God will bless us as we do.

AMEN and AMEN.