



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, October 23-29 (A) – 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Focus: *Have Courage in God*

word of life

“So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.” 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NRSV)

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

If you find yourself wanting to discover more about the context of the letters written by Paul, read the book of Acts for a description of Paul’s missionary trips. It might be helpful to secure a map of Paul’s missionary travels. Find towns such as Philippi and Thessalonica. Try to get a perspective on the distance between towns.

Acts 16-17 gives a glimpse of the life of Paul on the road. He visits Philippi to preach, and after healing a woman, he is thrown in jail. From there he travels to several places before stopping at Thessalonica where there is a synagogue.

We associate Paul with preaching to the Gentiles, but in reality, he preaches to both Jew and Gentile. He stays three weeks in Thessalonica, including three Sabbaths, where he debates with the Jews in the synagogue. Paul uses scripture to defend his arguments that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. We read in Acts 17:4 how Jews, Greeks, and even women join him.

His visit upsets the locals and creates an uproar. One thing leads to another including an attack against a house owned by a man named Jason who is accused of entertaining Paul. That night Paul leaves town for another community.

1. *What keeps Paul preaching despite facing adversity?*
2. *How does adversity strengthen faith?*

When Paul writes his first letter to the Thessalonians, he openly talks about the challenges of preaching to those who do not want to hear his message. Despite the rejection he experiences, he does not believe his words and actions have been in vain. A congregation has flourished in Thessalonica despite the opposition. He writes, “. . . we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.” (1 Thessalonians 2:2 NRSV) Paul understands his courage as gift from God.

3. *Define courage.*
4. *Is courage needed to preach the gospel today? How so?*

Paul preaches to please God alone. He is not a people-pleaser. There is a certain amount of freedom in not worrying about opinion polls, surveys, and human whims. Paul is focused on Christ and Christ alone.

5. *How did Paul’s single-minded focus free him to face adversity?*
6. *Do you see any ways his attitude stirred adversity?*
7. *What lesson about courage can we learn from Paul?*

Paul chooses to preach with tenderness to the Thessalonians. He describes his approach in 1Thessalonians 2:7 as a nurse caring for her own children. His pastoral care for this congregation is striking.

word *among us*

In 1955 Rev. Robert Graetz, a white pastor in the American Lutheran Church (a predecessor body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), accepted a call to serve an all-black congregation in Montgomery, Alabama. His book, Montgomery: A White Preacher's Memoir describes the courage needed to preach and live during the Montgomery bus boycott. His young friend Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of many who dug deep in faith to stay the course.

1. *What do you recall from the Civil Rights movement?*
2. *How was courage needed by the Civil Rights leaders?*

Rev. Robert Graetz writes, "Jesus asked us to remember him in the sacred Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper. He wants us to remember that he gave his life that we might receive his forgiveness and become his people. If we forget, we risk losing not only our sense of history but also our identity and purpose." (vii, Montgomery: A White Preacher's Memoir)

3. *What does it mean to "risk losing our identity and purpose"?*
4. *How does the need for courage relate to the risk of losing our identity and purpose?*

The Civil Rights opened the door for others to have voice and opportunity. We can take inspiration from the courage of ordinary people to confront injustices and dare to vision a new age for our country.

There are times in our personal journey of life when we need courage. Those moments are rarely planned. But as we experience such moments, we find ourselves challenged to dig deep into a reservoir of strength provided by God alone.

5. *When have you needed courage in your life?*
6. *What is the source of your reservoir of strength and courage?*

faith practice *in daily life*

Strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

If we have not needed courage or perseverance in our daily witness to Jesus, perhaps we are taking too easy a path. Although we do not live in the Civil Rights era, there are people in our community who live under the mantle of injustice and struggle to claim their right for fair treatment. Peace cannot happen as long as there is injustice. Those who have a voice are called to speak on behalf of those who have no voice. Admittedly, that might take courage.

7. *Who in your community has no voice?*
8. *How might your voice amplify their voice?*

In baptism, Christ brings us into his passion for a world where justice and peace reigns. That means we share in his striving for justice. Striving does not necessarily mean walking the streets in a boycott or preaching from the pulpit. It might be confronting unfair hiring practices or stopping jokes which demean those who are different from us.

9. *What does it mean for you to strive for justice and peace?*
10. *What situations in your life will call upon you to dig into God's reservoir of courage?*

Prayer

Gracious God, give me courage to live as Christ. Amen

last word

Each day, pray for courage to live as Christ.

