



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, November 13-19 (C) – 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Focus: *Doing What is Right*

word of life

“Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (NRSV)

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

The context of the 2nd letter to the Thessalonians is important as we study today’s reading. There apparently were some in the Christian community who believed that the second coming of Christ was going to happen almost immediately (or certainly within their lifetime), so they had quit their work and responsibilities in the faith community to devote their time and energies to preparing for Christ’s return. They received the benefit of being a part of the community, but they bore no responsibility in its day-to-day life. Why work if all of this is soon coming to an end when Christ, merciful and forgiving, will receive us into the kingdom?

1. *Think of a time when knowing the future outcome influenced how you lived and responded in the present moment.*
2. *What are some of the responsibilities of being a member of a church?*

The writer of the letter refers to these believers as people “living in idleness” (vs. 6, 11), as “mere busybodies” (vs. 11), not doing any work. They rely on the generosity and charity of others.

3. *How would you define a “busybody”?*
4. *What are some characteristics of such a person?*

In contrast to those living in idleness, the example of the one who penned this letter is lifted up for the faithful to follow. “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it.” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8 NRSV) This was done to give an example to imitate.

5. *How can the work ethic and dedication of one person inspire and lead others?*
6. *Is there someone whose attitude and actions you would like to imitate? Describe him/her.*

The response to those “idle busybodies” seems harsh: “keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us.” (2 Thessalonians 3:6 NRSV) The response is even stronger—“Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10 NRSV) It is a matter of stewardship. The community has a responsibility to care for the individual, **and** the individual has a responsibility to use their God-given gifts for the sake of the community.

The second coming of Christ compels and propels us—not to complacency or to a denial of the needs of others—but to a dedication and a commitment to use our gifts for the sake of others. The gift of grace—the free and unmerited love and favor of God—does not give free license to do whatever we desire because we know we will be forgiven. It rather compels us to service to live out that grace in a grace-filled life. As our text says, “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.”

(2 Thessalonians 3:13 NRSV)

7. *How do you discern doing what is right?*
8. *How does it feel to do what is right?*
9. *Has your understanding and desire to “doing what is right” changed over the years? Explain your answer.*

word among us

Two stories about the understanding of grace:

Story 1: There was once a man who was on his deathbed. He was known for his “salty” personality. One afternoon, the pastor came to visit, and they spoke of life and death, family and community and of the passing of years. As the pastor was about to leave, he asked the man, “Are you afraid of dying?” The man thought for a moment and then with a faint smile said, “You know, pastor, I’m not afraid of dying. You’ve been preaching for years that we are saved by grace, not good works. And I haven’t done a good work in years!”

Story 2: It was a typical confirmation class—lots of activity and conversation. The topic that day was grace. “What is the definition of grace?” the leader asked. Suddenly, the activity turned to stillness, and the conversation to silence. Finally, one of the students bravely answered: “Grace is knowing that I will be forgiven for the sins I’m about to do.”

1. *How do these stories reflect an understanding (or misunderstanding) of grace?*
2. *What is your understanding of grace?*

We often have a distorted understanding of grace. That certainly seems to have been the case for the faith community in Thessalonica. The belief that Christ’s second coming was imminent led some to “live in idleness” – to forgo the work and responsibilities of living in community. It was grace without a change in action, grace without repentance, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* called “cheap grace.”

But grace is not free – it’s costly. Grace calls us not to complacency but to active engagement. Grace calls us to a life of service as we realize the profound gifts we by grace have been given. The question becomes not “what do I have to do to earn God’s love and favor” but rather “what am I going to do, now that I don’t **have** to do anything?” Grace does not lead us to idleness but rather propels us to faithful living. “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” (2 Thessalonians 3:13 NRSV)

3. *How does God’s grace motivate you to use your gifts for the sake of Christ and others?*
4. *What are **you** going to do now that you don’t have to do anything?*

faith practice in daily life

Strive for justice and peace throughout the world

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has as its tagline – its phrase summarizing its mission and purpose—the following words: *God’s work. Our hands.* We are called not to idleness but to active engagement in the world, trusting in God’s grace, knowing and believing that it is God at work in and through us, to be God’s hands of justice and peace.

5. *Where do you see God at work through those around you?*
6. *How is God at work through your hands and life?*

Prayer

Let not our hands be idle, O God, but use them instead for your good purpose in the world; through Christ our Lord. Amen

last word

Acknowledge ways you fall into idleness,
and then commit to active engagement.