

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

Pastor Scott Trevithick

Date: October 22, 2023, Year A, 21st Sunday after Pentecost

Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Title: Hope for the Future

Focus: The Apostle Paul writes with an encouraging, warm tone to recognize what these Jesus followers have done in this newly formed Christian community and inspire them with hope for the future. Foster the City seeks to provide hope through support for children and fostering families.

Worship Note: We are going to show a 6-minute video of “Philip’s Story,” the founder of Foster the City, who is a 3rd generation foster parent. The sermon will necessarily be shorter. **For more information about Foster the City**

- Visit their website at <https://fosterthecity.org>
- Check out their YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/c/FostertheCity>.

Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because 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.

⁶And 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, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For 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. ⁹For 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, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Hopes for our Yet-to-be Born Child

Somewhere around 26+ years ago my wife Kendra and I were in a classroom at Washoe Medical Center—yes, Washoe Med—many of you remember that that was the name at the time. We were expectant parents and we were meeting with a nurse educator and other prospective parents in a baby care class.

We learned how to swaddle a baby, and how to bathe, hold, and provide physical care in other ways. I also recall the educator posed a scenario to us. She asked us to think years down the road, 20 years or more. “Put yourself in that position or that time.”

- “What would you like your child to be like?”
- “What characteristics would you hope that he or she would display?”
- Think about those things, and then consider: “How would you like to raise your child in such a way that they would develop those characteristics?”
 - “What kind of parent would you need to be or what kind of time would you spend with them so that they would develop the characteristics that you would like to see?”

That scenario stuck out to me because it was different or beyond what I had expected from the class, which was the basics of physical care for a newborn.

Essentially, she proposed that we think about who we wanted our child to be and then to consider what type of parents we wished to be that would help nurture those characteristics in that child.

- **What are your hopes and dreams for your child and how will you invest in them to bring those qualities about?**

Paul and His Letter to the Thessalonians

This letter from the Apostle Paul to the community of believers in Thessalonica is the earliest of his letters. You can clearly tell it’s a letter:

- He’s talking directly to them. . .
- He opens with a greeting, which he offers also on behalf of Silas (called *Silvanus* here, a variant¹) and Timothy.

¹ it may be that "Silvanus" is the Romanized version of the original "Silas", or that "Silas" is the Greek nickname for "Silvanus". From the *Wikipedia* entry on "Silas" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silas#Name_and_etymologies
Originally cited in [Dunn, James D. G.](#), ed. (2003). [The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul](#). [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press](#). p. 21.

- He expresses thanks for them and mentions his prayers for them.

These are all expected elements of a letter from that time. Just like you could recognize the form of our written correspondence like letters or emails or even texts, Paul recognized and followed the expected form for a letter. At the same time, Paul goes beyond what's just expected in terms of form. His thanksgiving for them, for instance, is far more extended than a perfunctory acknowledgement.

His thanksgiving for them really continues throughout chapters one and two and into v. 13 of chapter three. That extended recognition and thanksgiving is like the prompt from the nurse educator in our Washoe Med Baby Care class. Just like that nurse went beyond the basics of physical baby care with us to prompt us to think about what we wanted our child to be like 20 or more years down the road, Paul, too, is taking time to express his hopes and dreams for this fledgling community of faith. He wants to see them grow and flourish and he invests himself in them. His relationship with them or investment in them is like the nurse educator who urged us by her question to determine and express what we hoped for our child and then consider in the most practical ways what it would take on our part as parents to nurture those qualities.

Sequence of Events (Drawn from Acts and 1 Thessalonians)

- How did Paul get connected with the people in Thessalonica?

According to Acts, Paul and Silas had been in jail in Philippi.² When they were miraculously freed, they went to Thessalonica, where they met with people in the synagogue and talked with them about Jesus, saying that he was the Messiah and explaining about his suffering and death. Acts says that many Jews were persuaded about Jesus, along with many Greeks and a number of leading women (Acts 17:4).

When he left Thessalonica, he continued to be concerned about them (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4), but was unable to return to them (2:17-20), so he sent Timothy to

² See Acts 16:11-17:9. Paul

strengthen and encourage them (3:1-2). When Timothy returned with a positive report about them, that prompted Paul to write the letter.

In the portion of the letter we receive/read today, Paul . . .

- Recognizes that they have heard the gospel not just in word, but that it has been received with power (Greek *dunamis*, from which we get the word *dynamite*.) (1 Thessalonians 1:5).
- They have taken action to follow the example Paul and Silas have set (vv. 5-6).
- They, in turn, have been an example of faith to others (vv. 6-7).
- They have done this even though they themselves have experienced persecution (v. 6).
- Their actions have made an impression on others: Paul says he's heard from people in the surrounding regions of Macedonia and Achaia (uh-KIE-uh) about their response of faith in service (v. 9).

Hopes and Dreams in Our Community of Faith

That nurse educator at Washoe Med prompted us to think about

- **What are your hopes and dreams for your child and how will you invest in them to bring those qualities about?**

In this warm and encouraging letter from the Apostle Paul, he expresses his hopes and dreams for them as a community and he points out the faith they have already expressed, particularly considering persecution from their surrounding culture.

- **What are some expressions of the “hopes and dreams” we have for ourselves or others in our broader community?**

Maybe the setting is not quite as poignant as being an expectant parent in a baby care class or of an eager grandparent wanting to support the new parents and newborn child, but surely our hopes and dreams extend beyond just familial relationships.

In the Spring of this year, Good Shepherd formally entered into a partnership with **Foster the City** to share in their mission to provide support for children and families in the foster system. Their vision is that instead of children and families waiting for support from the community, there will be a list of church families who are waiting for a child and family with whom to be matched.

Impact of unstable family situation on Foster kids (Stats from 2023 FTC materials)

The need for a supportive community to surround foster kids and families is significant. Here are some of the impacts on children in foster care and fostering families, as summarized by various statistics.

- Education—Only 53% of foster kids will graduate high school on time.
 - Only 3% of foster youth will earn a college degree.
- Higher risk behaviors and circumstances:
 - 50% of those who age out of the foster care system will develop a substance abuse problem.
 - Over 70% of young women aging out will become pregnant before age 21.
 - 33% will become homeless after aging out.
- Health
 - Have more complex health needs because of the trauma they have experienced.
 - 4 X more likely to have mental health issues.

Stressors on Foster Families

- Due to the challenges inherent in fostering, 60% of Foster Families nationwide will not renew again after 12 months.
 - The retention rate dramatically improves when fostering takes place within a supportive community.

Philip's Story (Show video—6 minutes in length)

Philip is a 3rd generation foster parent along with his wife and shares his story in this video. *View video.*

- **What are specific ways people at Good Shepherd can help?**
 - In our partnership with FTC, Good Shepherd has pledged to continue to
 - Highlight the number of children in our region who are in foster care/have been removed from their birth families.
 - Describe the stressors that foster families face and the need for support.
 - Tell the story of the need for **support families** (to surround the/a foster family with love, prayer, and tangible support).
 - Ask people to pray and talk about **serving as a foster family themselves**, knowing that then, in turn, would be surrounded by support families from Good Shepherd.
 - Financial support for Foster the City to help share in its mission.
- Cara Paoli, LCGS church member and Governing Board member and our FTC Advocate, is available after each service to answer questions.

May we identify the hopes and dreams we have within our broader community and find ways to invest ourselves in helping bring that about.