

Proper 24 (A)
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1 Thessalonians 1:1-5a (5b-10)
TLC, Keene, NH

The Living Proof of a Living Faith

To the church of Keene, New Hampshire, and surrounding communities in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

*“We give thanks to God always for all of you ... remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith**, and **labor of love**, and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Introduction

One of the joys of being a Pastor is ... [relate a couple of recent “thank you” notes ... & how I interpret their meaning].

It is this that our Savior and our faith call us to.

Main Thought: Yes, let “the people of God, fully convinced of God’s grace in Christ ... respond to the Gospel in faith, love and hope.” [McPeck, *CPR*, 6:4, 33]

A LIVING FAITH IS A FAITH THAT IS ... *LIVING*.

Amen.

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It was a short-lived ministry in Thessalonica. In Acts 17 we learn that Paul had *some* success there, but opposition was so great, he and his companions moved on only after 3 weeks. [Acts 17:1ff]. The prospect for a thriving community of faith in Thessalonica didn’t look good.

This is to say, from a human point of view, there was no reason for the Gospel to take root in that city. Widespread idolatry ruled the day [1:9], and when Paul would make any headway, the opposition was so strong, he had to quickly move on [Acts 17:5-9].

Why would the Word of the Lord prevail in such an environment?

That is the question isn't it? Where, today, we find ourselves in an environment that is growing in hostility, or at the very least indifferent, to the Gospel we proclaim. So, why would the Word of the Lord prevail in such an environment as this?

Because, when the Word of the Lord comes, it accomplishes the purposes for which it has been sent. Yes, when the Spirit of the Lord hovers over the waters of a vast, empty, and chaotic space, something happens. It did once over creation. It did once when Elijah drew up the battle lines with the prophets of Ba'al. It did once when the prophet Ezekiel prophesied over a valley of dry bones. It did once when a group of terrified women ran from the empty tomb with a message of the resurrected Savior. It did once over a community of believers in Keene, New Hampshire.

Where, all told, "this is a Sunday for Christians, not unbelievers," says one. [Wollenburg, *CJ*, 28:4, 446]¹ Unless, of course, the "seekers" among us want to get a snapshot of what happens when the Spirit of the living God descends on a people belonging to Him – not as ones "seen on TV," but real life disciples, who struggle to live the life Christ has called them to.

From whence does such a living faith look like? From whence does it come?

THE LIVING PROOF OF A LIVING FAITH FLOWS FROM *THE LORD'S GRACE AND PEACE.*

¹ *Paul, Silvanus [Silas], and Timothy, to the church [lit. "called out ones"] of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord **Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.***

¹ "Today is about encouragement and strengthening for those who 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' [Rev 7:14] It is ... for 'wonderers and wanderers' – those faithful who wonder that their purpose is to be as they wander through this life in response to the Savior's call." [Wollenburg, *CJ*, 28:4, 446]

“Grace and peace.” Not totally unrelated ... together marking the lives of Christ’s baptized and redeemed ones.

“All that the Christians are and have is due to God’s undeserved love. When sins are forgiven, peace with God is the [blessed] result.” [*Sermon Studies on the Epistles (SSoE)*, A, 346]

They are the lifeblood and the heart of not only who we are, but also of what we are called to proclaim and do. They are embodied in the Savior, who, in turn, is embodied in us ... us!

THE LIVING PROOF OF A LIVING FAITH REVELS IN THE JOY OF OTHERS WHO SERVE WITH US ON THE WAY.

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

Romans 16 ... one of my favorite chapters in the Bible.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. 11 Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. 12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[Well, maybe we'll ditch the "holy kiss" for now!]

Child of God, this is them. This is us. This is *you*.

"The faithful Christian in [her] regular pew, the courageous Christian smiling through his troubles, the generous Christian surprising us with [her] love. We ought to praise God for raising up people who fit those descriptions." [SSoE, 354] Even though it is not the person we imitate as much as their faith ... faith expressed in action.

THE LIVING PROOF OF A LIVING FAITH SPRINGS FORTH FROM A DEEP WELL OF THANKFULNESS ... expressed often [i.e. always] through prayers of thanksgiving.

² ***We give thanks*** [in continuous fashion] ***to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers ...***

For what do you give thanks? [Another recent note of thanks ...]

Thanks be to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ... for grace and peace ... for a living faith worked out alongside of others borne of water and the Spirit ... for the deep pool of God's grace that issues forth in thanks for all of His gifts.

THE LIVING PROOF OF A LIVING FAITH IS EXPRESSED IN ACTION ... EVIDENCED BY ALL.

³ ***Remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope*** ["your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope" - NIV] ***in our Lord Jesus Christ.***

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

[Galatians 5:6]

*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to **love** and good works.*

[Hebrews 10:22-24]

It’s what we were created and redeemed to be and to do – even before the very foundation of the world was laid.

*“For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith** ... We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

[Ephesians 2:8-10]

“The exact nature of these works and labors is not described by Paul. We will not define or limit them either.” [SSoE, 347]

But what might they look like in this place?

A people who are regularly in the Word and on their knees would be a great start. Followed by a people who support the work of their congregation with their time, talent and treasure – without having to be asked! [To ditch the critical spirit, which saps strength in the body.] Whatever that work may be, what prompts it is the gift of faith, the gift of knowing that when we do them “*by grace ... through faith ... for works*,” something happens – something happens in us, in our relationships, and in our life and witness to Jesus.

Celebrate that. Support it. Work out of the gift of faith God has given you.

THE LIVING PROOF OF A LIVING FAITH ultimately SERVES THE GOSPEL – the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection for all.

⁴ For we know, brothers [sacrificially and unconditionally] loved by God, that he has [elected] chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Here is a not so radical thought: “God’s election means, ‘God loves you. He loved you before you were born. He continues to love you now. He promises in his love to keep you as his own to eternity.’” [SSoE, 348]²

“He made His choice in eternity, and then carried out His love in time.” [SSoE, A, 376]

Where, as I stated in one of the on-line devotions of late, I am hopeful. Wherein, “Christian hope is not mere wishful thinking, but the confident expectation that God will do as he promises. Hope, as a synonym of faith, ‘is the conviction of things not yet seen’” [Hebrews 11:1; McPeck, 34].

Wherein, individually, and as a congregation, we are given our “marching orders” ... “grateful for blessings received ... joyful in our present state ...eager to serve.” [SSoE, 350] All in the *hope* of what our good and gracious God promises He will do, when we are willing to be led by Him in faith.

Conclusion

A couple of more “thank you” notes ...

Yes, let the people of God, fully convinced of God’s grace in Christ ... respond to the Gospel in faith, love and hope.

A LIVING FAITH IS A FAITH THAT IS ... *LIVING*.

Amen.

² “The doctrine is that God has from eternity resolved upon what He has effected in Christian in time; out of pure grace for Christ’s sake He has decreed to bestow those blessings on Christians, which, through His call, they now enjoy.” [Kopitske, *CJ*, October 1993, 378]