

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN

Roanoke, Virginia

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All Saints Sunday

“Take It In”

1 Thessalonians 2:5-13

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One commentator notes: it is rare for a preacher to tackle a epistle of Paul¹...well, we are going to try! The epistles are difficult because it is hard to understand what is being said within the text and behind the text, especially in our contemporary times. So, a little background information may help.

In his letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul writes to confirm—or reconfirm—their faithfulness. And so, he encourages them to continue to live in the way that is pleasing to God and reminds them of what they share as “brothers and sisters” of the gospel of God. Thessalonica was a prominent, commercial city, that was religiously and culturally diverse, and customary to the times, the people there had many deities. When Paul, Silas, and Timothy preached there, some received it, others did not, still others just assumed they were bringing yet another god to worship. And as it happens, the message of Christ crucified that they preached upset some folks enough to start a mob to hunt them down. And as Acts 17 details, the mob went to Jason’s house, but they only found Jason and some others, who they then

¹ From Jane Lancaster Patterson’s “Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13” for *Working Preacher*:
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-31/commentary-on-1-thessalonians-29-13-4>



threw in jail and forced to post bond. Paul escaped and wrote this letter not too long after while he was in Corinth.

Chapter 2 opens with Paul explaining how pure his missionary intentions were and how pure the message they preached was, and he calls them to remember how Paul, Silas, and Timothy treated them.

I want us to pay attention to the characteristics Paul uses to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians, and I want us to consider who in our life, your life, in the life of this church could also be characterized by such descriptions. This sermon will be a sermon of “wonderings.”

Listen as Paul continues in his letter, and listen for what Paul calls the Gospel of God...

⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed, ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ 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.

⁹ You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. ¹¹ As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹² urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³ We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Maya Angelou is quoted saying: people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

By this logic, what matters most in your daily living is *how you make someone feel*. Did you make them feel listened to or ignored, included or left out, amused or exhausted, belittled or built-up. I believe this logic to be true. However, what you say and what you do impacts how you make people feel.

There are people in our lives that make us feel, as it is said, “some type of way.” And it is not the good type. Yet, there are others in our lives, past or present, that have made us feel seen, heard, appreciated, loved, or any of the other good and positive words, who have set before us, through words and actions, an example of what life is really all about, a life worthy of God.



There are people in our lives, past or present, that have been open and vulnerable with us, which then creates a space that allows us to be open and vulnerable with them. And in that courageous space there is connection, connection that goes beyond the superficial, that takes us to a place of belonging.

Paul speaks of this same connection when he writes to the church in Thessalonica, and he uses two familial analogies: a mother and a father.

Paul says, “We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”

A nursing mother doesn’t use her power, her resources, or her authority for greed, to demand obedience, or to seek praise, as Paul defends.

A nursing mother uses her power, her resources, and her authority only to care for and nurture her child. A nursing mother gives of herself, gives fully and completely of herself for the well-being of her child.

Paul continues: “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.”

“We are determined to share our won selves.” What Paul is saying is that he feels such affection and desire for those in Thessalonica, he longs for them, he yearns to be with them again, and that in their deep connection, he wants to give his very own soul to them. Because he loves them so much.

I wonder who comes to mind when you think of the mother’s gentleness. I know there are people in my life, as I am sure in yours, that were gentle, that made me feel cared for, nurtured, protected—and it does not have to be a mother, or even a woman for that matter.

I wonder who in your life or who in the life of this church has been like a nursing mother, gentle in heart, someone who expressed love so deeply, who shared the gospel of God, and not just a take-it-and-go gospel, but a gospel that caused us to linger long enough with each other, that they then selflessly shared their souls.

Paul then says, “As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into God’s own kingdom and glory.”

I wonder who has urged you in your life of faith, who came alongside you on your journey, to watch out for you, and be with you.

I wonder who has encouraged you, who spoke words of life to your spirit, to boost your morale when things got hard.

I wonder who has pleaded with you, who shared their life experience and offered advice, testified that they have seen it both ways. Perhaps someone has said: “Look, child, I have been down THAT road, and it is not pretty. But, look son, look daughter, I have walked the road less traveled, the road marked by God’s grace and mercy, and I am telling you...it is a glorious road to behold!”

We need both a mother’s gentleness and protection and a father’s support and strength. We *need* both, and we can *be* both in return.



But too often we miss the gift of love and kindness right in front of us, shown through an encouraging word or a helpful hand at work. Too often we miss the gift of the other person who is with us, perhaps standing in front of us to lead, or standing behind us to follow, or even standing beside us simply as a friend. And sometimes we miss the opportunity to be that encouragement or help for another person.

Paul praises the Thessalonian church for receiving the gospel they proclaimed. Not only did they take it to then share it with others, but they took it in, they took it into themselves. It became part of their being. And they took it in, not as a human word, but as what it really is, God's word, God's living and actionable word, which is also at work in and through you.

I wonder if there is anything that holds us back from fully sharing our souls with our siblings in our family of faith. And I wonder what it means for us today, to receive the gospel of God and take it in, take into ourselves, making it a part of who we are, to then live a life worthy of God—or only by taking it in, we can then live a life worthy of God.

Shortly, we will offer a prayer as we remember, honor, and give thanks to God for the saints of Second Presbyterian Church and the saints of our own lives that have died this past year. Elizabeth and I will offer a prayer and read those names aloud. Then the bells will ring, and we will join in singing “Alleluia.”

During that prayer, I invite you to “take it in”—take in the silence, take in the sounds, take in the emotions, take in the memories that come and go, take in the words and actions, and take in the soul-sharing love of each name offered. And as we offer our own names, take in the moment as a gift of God. Because each saint named today is just that, a gift of God, who we deeply long for, and yearn to be with again, and with whom we have shared our souls.

Who are the saints of Second and who are the saints of your life?

According to Paul, saints are those who, having received the gospel, gently nurtured and cared for others through selfless, sacrificial love, those who urged us and encouraged us, who worked tirelessly for the good of others, who testified to the goodness of God, by sharing their souls in the way they spoke, through the work they did, and by the way they made us feel.

And for that we give thanks.

Amen.

