

“Faithfulness over the long-haul”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday November 8, 2020

1 Thessalonians 4

I'm glad today is our Remembrance Day service.

I need to be reminded of the sacrifices and difficulties other generations have faced.

It helps put this pandemic and the changes in our lives in perspective.

I was reading a little on the life and service of Robert McCrae, the author of In Flanders fields.

He saw 700 casualties in one day...

When war was declared in the end of July 1914, many people thought the war would be over by Christmas.

It was four very long years and every one living through those years was affected by it.

How did they make it through those years?

One certain answer is through faith, and by the grace of God.

As we turn to God's word this morning, I find words of encouragement, instruction and help for how to live in difficult days such as we are in now.

Paul is writing to a scattered church, that is facing all kinds of pressures and uncertainty, persecutions, and problems.

So to the home churches, Paul writes:

¹⁻³ Friends, we ask you—*urge* is more like it—that you keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, ***not in a dogged religious plod, but in a living, spirited dance.***

We might be facing trials, we might be facing pains and problems, and sorrows – but our lives are not to be a dogged religious plod, but a living, spirited dance.

Paul himself was thrown in prison, beaten, he worried about the churches he founded that he couldn't get to visit, he worried about family and friends he was separated from.

Paul had all kinds of reasons to be discouraged and down-hearted.

But he reminds us that God has called us to a living, spirited dance with God and with one another.

And then Paul lays out a few practical teachings for today:

- 1. Learn to appreciate and give dignity to your body, not abusing it, as is so common among those who know nothing of God.***

We are made in the image of God, we are made flesh and bone.

Our bodies have dignity.

Jesus lived and breathed and had a life that looks very much like yours and mind.

Give your bodies rest, treat them with dignity taking care of them, getting exercise and not abusing them.

2. Don't run roughshod over the concerns of your brothers and sisters. Their concerns are God's concerns, and God will take care of them.

Paul is writing to the church – to a community- to people who have been called together into new life in Jesus.

And just after Paul tells the people to treat themselves and their bodies, with dignity, he reminds them that they are to treat each other with dignity also.

We are in this together.

And there is nothing like COVID-19 to remind us that we are in this together.

What you do affects me- and what I do affects you.

It can be difficult to listen to one another, to be gracious to one another, to be considerate of each other, and forgiving of one another over the long- haul.

But in the midst of this pandemic we are reminded that we really need each other.

Paul describes what our personal lives and community life together is to look like:

We've warned you about this before. God hasn't invited us into a disorderly, unkempt life but into something holy and beautiful—as beautiful on the inside as the outside.

Our lives together, and our lives each one of us, ***are to be holy and beautiful.***

This life – this community called Calvin Church matters.

Sharing life together matters.

You matter, I matter, and we are called to work together to build something- a shared life- a community- that is holy and beautiful.

And Paul goes on to tell them that the Holy Spirit- the Spirit of Jesus is working this out in our midst ***and if you disregard this advice, you're not offending your neighbors; you're rejecting God, who is making you a gift of his Holy Spirit.***

Paul continues: ***Regarding life together and getting along with each other, you don't need me to tell you what to do. You're God-taught in these matters. Just love one another! You're already good at it. Keep it up; get better and better at it.***

And I have to say to you folks of Calvin Church, Paul is right, you don't need me to tell you what to do. You're God-taught in these matters. Continue loving one another! You are good at it.

Keep it up and continue to get better and better at it.

This church is good at caring- I am proud of this church community.

I am thankful for all of you – for the ways you show love and concern for each other.

You pray for one another, you phone another, you reach out in care for one another, and you find practical ways to love and support each other.

Keep it up!

And continue, by the grace and love of God, to get better and better at it.

There is strength and wisdom and hope in this community.

The Holy Spirit is working in the lives of God's people, and it shows in this community and in our shared lives, as we seek to live in God's kingdom together.

We are not perfect – and we do not do all things perfectly- so then God teaches us and we have opportunities to practise forgiveness and to seek forgiveness, and learn to do things better.

And just for good measure Paul throws in this advice: ***Stay calm; mind your own business; do your own job.***

The world is watching – and it should want to be part of what we have!

These are not easy days.

But we are not in a dogged religious plod, but are together in a living spirited dance, with more to come.

Paul ends this chapter with these words:

you must not carry on over them like people who have nothing to look forward to, as if the grave were the last word. Since Jesus died and broke loose from the grave, God will most certainly bring back to life those who died in Jesus.

In the midst of the trials and uncertainties, the pains and sorrows, we live this spirited dance together.

God has invited us to be part of a life that is holy and beautiful, and this life is just the beginning for those who are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.