

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost – Year A
October 18, 2020
Deacon Cindy Roehl
Church of the Good Shepherd, Dunedin, FL

- SERMON -

In our readings this morning the Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians the words, “We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

There are three specific phrases I want to go through with you this morning.

Your work of Faith.

Your labor of love.

Your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s start with the phrase, “your **WORK** of faith”. So, what is our work of faith? Well, first, it is **NOT** the performing of a *certtain* task or doing *particular* good deeds. They would be good deeds, of course, but these deeds are the result of our **faith**. Because of our faith, we do good work.

Sometimes we use the word ‘faith’ so often that it might be worth our while to pay attention to what it means. Some synonyms for the word “faith” are:

trust · belief · confidence · conviction · reliance.

And as a result of our faith in Christ (our *trust* in Him, our *belief* in Him, our *confidence*, *conviction* and *reliance* on Him) this work just naturally flows.

And then we have the phrase “your **LABOR** of love”. At first these two phrases might sound like the same thing, but they are not.

WORK is an activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result. A good result, of course.

But **LABOR** is more difficult work requiring greater effort. It could be mental or physical, but requires more perseverance and energy. Something that you may not normally expend the effort for, but love pushes you. Have you ever done something for someone that went beyond your usual desire or ability, requiring more discipline and effort than you would normally ever do, but for that person, you do it? Why? Because you love them.

And when you experience God's presence in your lives, His love flows through you, enabling you to do more than you would ever consider in the natural. You find you love people you may not have loved before, and you want to help them. You go out of your way and you exercise greater effort because this person has a need, and you are there. And as you experience God's love flowing through you to that person, you experience this gift of loving effort on behalf of this person, and you persevere.

I know this, because I'm preaching to the choir today. I've seen you. I've watched you. And as the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "I give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in my prayers, remembering your work of faith and labor of love."

And then Paul uses the phrase, "your STEADFASTNESS of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ".

The definition of "steadfastness" is the quality of being resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering. To be resolute and unwavering in your hope in Christ.

The Biblical definition of hope is "confident expectation." According to Romans 8:24-25; Hebrews 11:1,7, hope is a firm assurance regarding things that are unclear and unknown. And according to Proverbs, hope is a central component of the life of the believer.

There's an old hymn written by Edward Mote in 1837. Some of the words go...

*My HOPE is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But WHOLLY lean on Jesus' name*

On Christ the solid Rock I stand

*When darkness hides His lovely face
I REST on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds - within the veil*

On Christ - the solid Rock - I stand

With all that's going on around us, in our country and around the world, we may feel darkness has hidden His face, but we can rest on His "unchanging grace". And we can see what the Thessalonians did through Paul's words saying, "for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

The reputation that this parish has built in THIS community is strong. People know Church of the Good Shepherd as the church that started the United Faiths Walk of Peace, that comes in second in giving food to the Dunedin Cares Food Pantry, that helps the homeless and needy

through the Furniture Thrift Store. And this parish gives thousands to those needing help with their utilities through the Rector's Discretionary Fund. And within our own parish community here, there are those who have donated much through this pandemic to help our own church family who are struggling.

You have set an example!

I believe this is an example of Jesus' words this morning - to give to "God the things that are God's." In the Book of Common Prayer there is a prayer For the Right Use of God's Gifts (on Page 827) which says,

Almighty God, whose loving hand *hath* given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor *thee* with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of *thy* bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Through this time when things sometimes appear to be upside down, we are so blessed to have a loving God. A God who said to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I – will – give - you - rest."

May we continue in our work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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