

2nd Sunday in Lent: March 12, 2017
“Everybody Needs Somebody”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is our reading from 1 Thessalonians 3 and 4.

When you love someone, you are inevitably concerned about their welfare. You want to share everything with them: happiness, sorrow, excitements, hopes, fears, better, worse, richer, poorer, sickness and health. This is especially true when you are head over heels in love, but it is also true in families and among friends. In order for a relationship to endure, personal contact is necessary. Letters, emails, phone calls, social media, text messages, are fine; but nothing beats good old fashioned human, face-to-face interaction.

In our world it is getting increasingly difficult to put the phones down and interact with people around you, in your home, in your work, at restaurants, walking through a store I have to teach my kids to watch out for the many oblivious human beings locked into the world on their phone, and forgetting they are still in a real world. There are many who have supplanted face-to-face interactions with God Himself that they receive here through His Word, with His body and blood, with a digital version that allows them to remain isolated in their own little worlds. There are some who are truly unable to come, but many more who chose not to and instead attempt to replace the One True God.

The 6th Petition reminds us of the reality that false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice are going to attack us. The devil, the world, and my own sinful nature will seek many ways to get us to turn from God’s Word, turn from God’s ways, and seek other things. We search for ways out, we are tempted to dispose of God’s directions, which seem too hard, and walk in our own ways, because they seem much easier. We follow our own directions, or scour the internet, comb the bars, hunt the community activities that will keep me only hearing what I want to hear. We are united to a select few, and disconnected from many in the body of Christ.

To serve in a world of connected disconnectedness is difficult, and St. Paul experienced many of the same things. Paul liked to keep in contact with the congregations he had founded and served. He would write to inform, rebuke,

encourage, and strengthen them so that the membership of the church would continue to stay close to Jesus and grow in the faith. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica at least two different times. This was a harbor town and a commercial center, and also an important communications center situated on a main road connecting Rome to the East.

It was a congregation that was predominately Gentile. These were not Jews who had grown up in the faith. They weren't brought up in the customs and teachings of God's Law from the beginning. They had a more worldly raising. Matters of sexuality, issues of marriage, living together outside of marriage, homosexuality, divorce, sins pertaining to the desecration of the body and the giving up of the basic structure of the family to serve personal goals had different teachings in the Gentile world. There was more that was permissible. Control was not really important. Passion and lust were accepted as signs of the times. The sentiment of the Gentile world could be summed up with the phrase, "If it feels good, do it."

When these Gentiles were brought into the Church, they had to break from their Gentile ways, and learn God's ways. While Paul was with them, not only did he start this new congregation, he also taught and spoke to the Jews in their own synagogue. A culture war over the truth then began. Paul proclaimed to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ for whom all of God's people had waited, and that Jesus was Savior of the whole world, Jews and Gentiles. This did not sit well with the Jews, and they attacked one of the homes of the Gentile Christians because they thought Paul was there. Paul fled to Berea, the Jews followed him there; which caused Paul to bolt to Corinth where he would stay for two years.

The church in Thessalonica remind on Paul's mind. Could they withstand persecution? Would they believe what the Jews were saying about him—that he was a snake-oil salesman, a con artist, eager for donations only to keep them for himself? When Paul could no longer simply wonder how things were, he sent Timothy to learn firsthand how things were faring. To his delight, Timothy came with good news. He writes, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—⁷ for this reason,

brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.”¹

Paul was worried that Satan might have separated them from the true faith. He was led to thank God for them and pray that somehow they might be brought together again, so that through the Gospel, they might be strengthened and build up what is lacking in their faith.

First Paul begins with prayer—a prayer to God as the One who directs the life of the Christian and to the Lord Jesus as the One who builds up brotherly love in His people, so their lives may reflect God’s love in them; both to their fellow believers, and as a witness to those not yet in God’s family. That kind of love will be strong enough to stand the strain of this life right up to that moment when they stand under the scrutiny of the final judgment. Paul prayed that the Lord Jesus would bring him back to Thessalonica again, but it did not happen at this particular time. It did not happen because the faith of the Christians at Thessalonica did not depend on Paul or Timothy, or any other apostle. The faith is not about Paul, or Silas, or Pastor Koepp; it is completely dependent on the Lord.

So it is with us also. The fact that we know ourselves to be sinners, violators of God’s holy law in flagrant and obvious ways so apparent to others and in sly and silent ways known only to ourselves and God, is a result of the Lord’s action. It brings us to a knowledge of our sin, but more importantly, it also brings us to repentance. The fact that we know Jesus to be our Savior is also the result of God’s activity. Through the Gospel, He brings us to faith, and through His Word He keeps us in the faith.

How wonderful to know that our faith and our very salvation are not dependent on anyone else. How good to know that God, who directed the lives of Paul and the Thessalonians so that their mutual love and devotion to Jesus were kept alive and grew, directs our lives in the same way and provides for us in the times when we are without the people we feel are necessary to us.

God said no to Paul’s request to return to Thessalonica, and instead used this as an example for us of the love produced by the Lord in the hearts of His true followers.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 3:6–7

The Thessalonians become imitators of the apostles in the way they endured affliction. As the Lord would make the love of the Thessalonians “increase and abound in love for one another and for all,”² He would also strengthen their hearts so that they would be “blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”³

That does not mean these believers would never sin, but that their sins would be removed daily by the blood of Christ, in whom they trusted as their Savior. Love is the product of the faith the Holy Spirit instills in us. That is how faith shows itself—love toward each other and toward those outside the faith as well. What does that look like? “abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”⁴

Why the emphasis on love? Simply because everybody needs somebody. We were created for love, and successful living is rooted and grounded in God, who is love, who loves us in Jesus Christ, and makes our love increase and overflow for each other. This drives the Christian to love the way God intended, for in that way we find true love, true joy, true happiness. When we are caught in false love, in our own version or the world’s understanding of love, it can be hard to break from that. In fact, on our own it is impossible and requires death. Death to our old ways, and through Christ’s love we are given a new heart, new mind, new will, a new life.

Before we can love others, we must be recipients of God’s love. We cannot really give God any love, as He is already perfect love. Jesus told us to, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”⁵ This is for our benefit, not God’s. We cannot add to what God already is, but we do receive strength from His Spirit that builds our faith, and when we do, His love

² 1 Thessalonians 3:12

³ 1 Thessalonians 3:13

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

⁵ Matthew 22:37

flows through us, and we demonstrate our love to God by loving those around us; hence Jesus continues with the second greatest commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁶

Christ’s blood flows through His body. Think about that. Your heart pumps blood to all major organs and extremities to keep your body alive and well. Jesus blood is poured out on the cross, and He through His Word, locates it in the chalice and pours it into your mouths. You receive His blood, His forgiveness, His love and that gives you life, as you then live and move and have your being in this world. He takes your sins, purifies you, and then sends you into the world refreshed and renewed, and you are not alone. Here, we come face-to-face with our Heavenly Father, fed by our Savior/Brother, and strengthened by The Helper/The Comforter. We weekly have a face-to-face, human interaction with God Himself. Personally, He speaks, personally He restores, personally we receive His love.

“To Jesus we for refuge flee,
Who from the curse has set us free,
And humbly worship at His throne,
Saved by His grace through faith alone.”⁷ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Matthew 22:39

⁷ 579 The Law of God Is Good and Wise; verse 6