

Oct 31 10 2 Thess. 1:3-4

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

This morning is the last Sunday in October, also known as Halloween, but for the Christian faith it is called Reformation Sunday. This is the day that the church celebrates Martin Luther's brave decision to take those 99 pages of things that he was against in the Catholic Church and post them on the door of a church and this was the beginning of the reformation, reforming the church and its doctrines. It is through Luther we learn that we are saved by faith, not by works. It is through him and the likes of John Wesley that we are reminded that salvation is a gift of God through his wonderful grace and the obedience of his son who came to give us new life on this earth and prepare of us a place in eternity.

Today we turn to Paul's writing to the Thessalonians to learn about walking in faith, love and endurance. Though most of his writings are corrections and filled with the right way of living the faith, there also is praise and thanksgiving. So on this final Sunday in October when the ghosts and goblins come out tonight to get their treats, let's look ahead with thanksgiving and praise thanking God for those who have walked the faith with faithfulness. You see, on the Catholic calendar November 1 is all Saints day where they celebrate those who have died in the faith. Interesting on the last day of October evil is thought of with witches and such. And on the first day of November we celebrate all the saints that sit in glory. One day we think of evil...the next we think of victory over that

evil. Praise God for all the saints in glory that have fought the good fight and now rest from their labors.

Hear Paul's word found in 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4. **READ**

The first thanksgiving is because their **faith is growing**. Faith like a muscle has to be exercised. It is one thing to have faith, but it becomes more difficult to walk in faith. Most people believe in something, and even say they believe in God. However, it's that walk thing. We don't always trust. We trust what we can see. We don't trust what we can't see. Even today every politician wants us to trust them to make changes and turn our country around. But if I was to ask how many of us believe those we are going to vote for won't be like others, I bet most people will say they'll never change, Tea Party or not. When things go our way that's one thing because it's easy to say we have faith. But when things don't go quite like we expect then that's another matter. We grow in our faith just like those who exercise grow stronger by exercising, not becoming couch potatoes and exercising just the hand to mouth thing. We need to exercise our faith. Our creeds begin "I believe in" and goes on from there. If you want to have a better prayer life then exercise on your knees. If you want to understand God's word exercise your brain by reading his word in the Bible, or joins us in Sunday School studying a Max Lucado book.

When you read Hebrews 11 you find a list of people who walked by faith. We remember when their faith was strong but we forget they came a long, long way. Abraham

left his home and went to a place God had prepared for him. In many ways that was the easy part of it. The rest was learning about the area and then living there and trying to be God's people in a land where no one knew their God. Add to that a promise of a child to be born to this barren couple. Year after year the promise seemed to fade away as both Abraham and Sarah got beyond child bearing years. Then one day it happened. When Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90 a wonderful promise was fulfilled as Isaac was born. Now I know most of us have been thankful that we had children when we were younger and had more energy. But Sarah and Abraham felt very blessed and thanked God for their gift even in their old age.

Walking by faith is not knowing the outcome but believing in the one who gave the promise. Read that chapter in Hebrews and see the names that came a long way in their faith walk with God.

WHERE do you need exercise your faith and trust him today?

The second thing Paul praised them for was **for their love**. We are taught in scripture to love one another. Now I know that often is hard. We have a more difficult time loving someone who has hurt us then to love someone who agrees with us. It's hard to love someone who is always negative because they seem to zap the spiritual strength right out of you. You can always find fault with things or in people. I mean look at all the political ads these days. We don't have many politicians telling us how they will do what

they claim others have not done. But they certainly can criticize. In just a few days all this stuff will be over and we will be back to normal for a few months until the next round of elections are due and it seems with each new election the smear campaign and negative adds get worse and worse. Negativity doesn't show love. Jesus said once that if a soldier tells you to carry his equipment a mile offer to carry it 2 miles. If someone slaps you on one side of the cheek turn the other one to him. We have a hard time with that. We are protective people and that's alright at times because if you don't protect yourself then you can really be hurt. But then there are times that love needs to be shown. We read those precious words from John 3:16 that touch our mind and our souls where it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave us his son so that whoever would believe in him could have eternal life." Isn't that a promise we all bank on? I think so. We thank God for loving us so much that he gave us his son. But think of it. What have we done to deserve that love? Be honest now. Be real honest. What have you done to earn that kind of love that God has for you that he was willing to let his son die on a cruel cross for your sins? If you are sincere you would answer you really don't deserve his love and you would be right. But Jesus didn't say there was a qualifier to God's love. No! That verse doesn't say God sent his son to the good people...or the rich people... or the deserving people...or the giving people. No! My Bible says, and every translation of this verse I've read says God so loved the world and those in it that he sent his son so that **WHOEVER WOULD BELIEVE** could have eternal life. When Jesus hung on the cross he didn't pray "Father

forgive those who have loved me.” No! His love went beyond that to his enemies, those who were standing beneath the cross, and those who put him there, those who turned him over to Pilate to be crucified. He said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” Isn’t that the symbol of his outstretched arms? His love is inclusive, not exclusive. He loves all people. He loves the sinner not the sins they commit. He loves those who turn their backs on him although he keeps knocking on the door of their hearts right till the last moment of decision. In the Upper Room when he had risen and Thomas would not believe he was alive unless he could see the nail prints and put his own fingers into his fleshly body he stood in front of a doubting Thomas and invited him to come touch those wounds and stop doubting but believe. Or how about the conversation Jesus had with Peter about love. He asked Peter if he loved him three times and if he did then he had a mission for him to do. Peter said, “Lord you know I love you.” This from a man who had denied him 3 times, the final denial came with cursing as the old fishermen’s former life came out as he denied not just he wasn’t a disciple but he didn’t even know the man.

Love! We are commanded to love one another. Some Christians might tolerate one another but do they really love each other? Do you practice love? Do you love your neighbor as yourself? I bet we all have room to grow in that one. Read the scriptures and you will find out... it’s the one who has a need.

And then Paul praises them because **they were learning how to be patient.** You know, that's one thing I bet most people struggle with. We hate to wait too long in lines. We hate to wait for results for test. When you are sick and try and make a doctor's appointment sometimes you got to wait to get in. I grew up where my doctor was a block away and he made house calls and always had room for one more patient that day no matter how long it took. People pass me on the road weaving in and out so they can get to the next cut off a nana second faster than I do. It just happened the other day as some person went from one lane to the other cutting in and out just to get to his cutoff. If you don't leave a red-light quick enough then the person behind you might begin to honk their horn. In fact yesterday in front of my house it happened twice. The first person in line was slow to take off and the beeping began. Impatient! I read a little while ago about a woman who pulled up to a stop sign and when she began to go again her car stalled and she was stuck there. She tried to get the motor to crank but to no avail. It must have been a minute or two before the guy behind her began to blow his horn over and over again in discuss. She finally got out of her car went to the guy behind her and said, "Hey. How about letting me honk your horn while you go and try and start my car." The impatient driver just drove off. I love those bumper stickers that say "Honk! If you love Jesus." I wonder what really

w o u l d h a p p e n i f y o u h o n k e d .

Patients! We want it. We pray for it. But the one thing we know is this. Patience doesn't come overnight. Patience, according to God's word, is long suffering. It's learning to live with the situation until you find a solution. Many people who get sick don't get sick as quick as a wink, and we might not always get well that quickly, though that's what we want.

Jesus healed 10 lepers one time, but if you read the story you find they weren't healed immediately. They were healed as they went on their way to the Temple Priest to show they no longer were to be considered outcasts. They could have been discouraged because they could not see any evidence they were healed. None of them went away discouraged but trusted the words of Jesus... and as they went they were healed. The sad thing was that only one who began to see his skin begin to heal returned to thank Jesus.

General Naaman had leprosy and traveled to see the prophet Elisha to be healed. You talk about needing patience, let me tell you his story. Because of a servant girl who heard how a prophet in Israel could do great things and might heal the general of his leprosy he got permission to travel and see if the prophet would help him. When he gets to Israel after traveling for many days Elisha tells him to go and dip 7 times in the Jordan River. Naaman wasn't too keen on the idea because they had cleaner rivers where he came from. But his servant talked him into doing it so down to the river he goes and he steps into the dirty Jordan River and dips until the water covers his head and each time he comes

up nothing. Not one sore has been changed. He was angry and felt this was stupid and was about to quit. This was ridiculous he thought. Medicine yes. A quick pill yes. A hands on and words proclaimed okay, but dipping 7 times in a filthy river, stupid. But with some coaxing from his servant he was persuaded to go the rest of the dips and after the 7th dip when he came up his leprosy was gone. Patience in this situation paid off.

How's your patience? I bet most of you are like me. You got some, but you wish you had more. Sarah Benner and I are waiting to have weeks of 100 and more in regular attendance. I'm patiently awaiting a long with our wonderful trustees for the new roof to begin and finished. We sometimes pray to be more patient and we add to our prayer, "And God, I need it right now!"

Paul says to the church these words of encouragement. "We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring." In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus talked about not being over anxious because it will not do you any good. Seek first the kingdom of God and allow God to supply all your needs. Let go of your anxiety and trust in the Big Guy. After all, he knows exactly what you need.

The other day I was taking Rebekah home after going shopping. As I was pulling out of my street onto the highway I noticed my neighbor across the street signaling me to come over so I drove across the street rolled down the window and he said "I need you." I got out of the car and went to see if he was okay. When I went in he was in tears because 3

months ago around this date his wife of 53 years had passed away and he was looking for some spiritual help. I left to take Booboo home and returned to spend a little time with a man I hardly know even after these 5 years of being his neighbor. We didn't know he lost his wife because we were out of time that weekend when it happened. But the following week he came across the street and told me. So we talked, we laughed, I tried to give him words of encouragement, after all, I had been working on this particular sermon just a few hours before, and when his daughter came we prayed and I told him it will be alright one day because God will take care of him. For those in our own congregation who are going through that, I know, we all know it is tough, and we also know that our God will see you through it one day at a time.

You never know when and where you might be called upon to give words of encouragement or to whom. Even though Paul had not seen this church in quite a while he heard from others about their faith, their love, their patience and he was proud how they had endured all the stuff that came their way.

And so it is with us today. Stuff does happen to good Christian people. We are not immune from getting cancer, having relationship problems, having major surgery, or losing a job, or even a loved one. We know this is all part of life in an imperfect life. Now when we get to heaven all that stuff will be gone. No more cancer, no more surgery, no more broken relationships. That's why we have words of encouragement in the scriptures to remind us that it will be okay one day. Don't give up the battle, continue to believe,

continue to stay on track, continue to trust in God, continue to walk by faith, continue to study God's word, continue to be in fellowship in the church, continue to continue to continue turning all things over to God.

So I would encourage everyone here to keep growing in your faith. Learn to love your neighbor and even your enemies. And be patient. Remember this, you are Christians under construction. God isn't through with you yet. You are in a process to become like Jesus, and I can tell you this from experience, sometimes it seems difficult, but then...just think of the rewards for those who persevere to the end.

Let me end by using part of an email I received from my friend Jim in Florida. It's really an amazing email pretty thought provoking. But this is the one thing I want to say because it concludes with these words.

“When things get tough, always remember...faith doesn't get you around trouble, it gets you through it!” Then it says, “When you relinquish the desire to control your future, you obtain happiness.”

So may it be today with God's people. Turn to your neighbor and give them a high five and say.....amen!