



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Understanding the New Testament 1 and 2 Thessalonians

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thess 4:15-17 NRSV

⁶ Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 2 Thess 3:6-10 NRSV

Like 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians are, in form, two letters of Paul written to the same community. However, unlike the Corinthian letters, most scholars agree that both were not written by Paul. The consensus is that 1 Thessalonians is an authentic Pauline letter from the early First Century and that 2 Thessalonians is a pseudo-Pauline letter probably written toward the end of the First Century. Second Thessalonians may have been written to the Church in Thessalonica but could have been written to another community.

First Thessalonians is believed to be the earliest of Paul's known letters and indeed the earliest of all known Christian writings. It is usually dated around 49 C.E. approximately 25 or 30 years after the crucifixion of Christ. First Thessalonians provides insight into Paul's method of operation that differs from that described in Acts. Acts describes Paul as beginning his evangelistic efforts in the synagogue when he arrives in a new community. Although Paul very likely associated with the synagogue because of his strong Jewish roots, he apparently did much of his proselytizing through some sort of leather shop run by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. This conclusion is based upon his defense of their ministry among the Thessalonians beginning in 1 Thessalonians 2.

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.* 1 Thessalonians 2:9-12. NRSV

Paul and his friends “worked night and day” to support themselves while spreading the Gospel. Acts 18:3 alludes to Paul being a “tentmaker” although the term translated “tentmaker” could also refer to other occupations associated with leather. These scholars speculate that Paul and his companions established a leather shop in the market district, using it as an opportunity to meet people and spread the Gospel. The fact that Paul refers to the members of the church as converted pagans and not as Jews or persons associated with the synagogue also brings into question the efficacy of Paul’s efforts to proselytize his fellow Jews. 1 Thess 1:9.

Paul’s Gospel was apocalyptic in nature; the end of time is coming when the Son of God who died for our sins will return. But, no one knows the actual date of Christ’s return:

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² *For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.* ³ *When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!* 1 Thess 5:1-3. NRSV

However, enough time has passed since the establishment of the Church at Thessalonica that converts are beginning to die and that has created a crisis of faith. Members of the church want to know what will happen to the dead upon Christ’s return. Paul’s message is that the dead will be called first by Christ:

¹⁵ *For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.* ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷ *Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.* 1 Thess 4:15-17 NRSV

Note that Paul’s words encompass all those who are left. There are none “left behind.” In Paul’s theology there are the righteous dead and the righteous living who are called to Christ. Since he is describing the end of history, those who are not called to eternal life are gone forever.

Second Thessalonians is believed to be a pseudo-Pauline letter, in part, because of the theology of the apocalypse it expresses. In First Thessalonians, Paul says that the end of time will come like a thief in the night and no one knows when that time will come. There is no mention in First Thessalonians, nor any other of the Pauline letters considered authentic, of a “lawless one” who will come into the world first; i.e. an “anti-Christ” figure. Yet the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians focuses upon this person as a “sign” of the end in contradiction to 1 Thessalonians. The intended recipients of this letter had apparently begun to worry that the end of time had already arrived and they had somehow missed it.

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, ² *not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.* ³ *Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.* 2 Thess 2:1-3 NRSV

They may have felt that the end of time had come because the community was experiencing persecution and suffering. 2 Thess 1:3-12.

Another aspect of this belief that the end of time was either imminent or already arrived is that some members of the community had stopped working and had decided to wait out the last few days. We have seen this phenomenon in recent years when people, believing the end of time was imminent, quit their jobs and sold all their possessions to await the end. In Thessalonica these people were placing a burden on the rest of the community. It is in this context that the writer of the letter admonishes the people:

*¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.
2 Thess 3:10. NRSV*

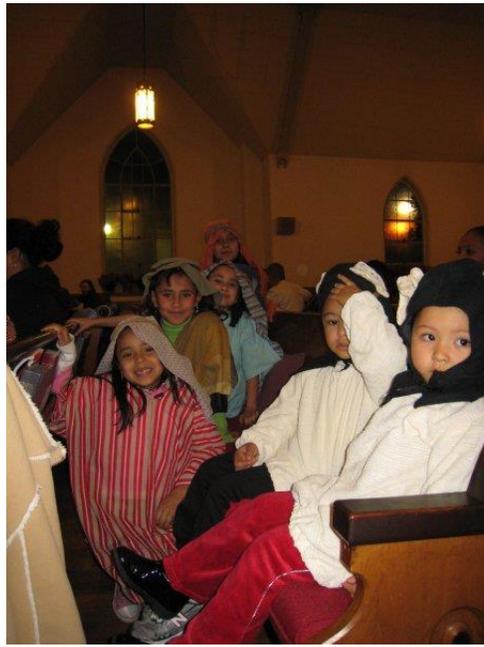
You might recognize that verse because it has become a favorite “proof text” for some politicians justifying cutting off any assistance for the poor. Yet this text in no way addresses those people who are old, sick or disabled (including many disabled veterans) who cannot work or the many people unemployed simply because there is no work. Poverty is a real and a complex issue in this nation and has been throughout all recorded history. It is not disposed of in this text from 2 Thessalonians that deals with specific members of a religious community who had made the decision not to work. The Gospel calls us to reach out and assist those in need, not humiliate them or abandon them.

Next week: The Pastoral Letters, 1&2 Timothy and Titus

What Is An Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

If you have not heard of it yet, We are planning an Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant for Sunday, December 8th . But what is an unrehearsed Christmas Pageant?

The typical Church Christmas Pageant is a telling of the Christmas story by our children by means of a play. Usually there are about three weeks worth of chaotic rehearsals which require young children to memorize lines and where they are supposed to be during the play. The result is often quite jumbled with children showing up in the wrong places at the wrong times and forgetting their lines. None of that usually matters much to the parents and families because they simply came to see their own child anyway.



The Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant produces much the same result without all the angst associated with rehearsals and trying to get young children to memorize a script. The children dress up as Shepherds, Sheep, Stars, Angels and Wise Persons. There is a narrator to tell the story, supported by congregational singing of Christmas Carols. Everyone enjoys participating in the program (there are opportunities for adults to dress up as well) and then we break for punch and cookies. We will also provide an opportunity for children and adults to make an offering of canned food or money to support the food pantry at GraceWorks.

The pictures here will give you some idea of what is involved in the way of costumes. Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt are coordinating this event but will need help from as many members of the church as are willing to help to get costumes together and otherwise organize the event. Please prayerfully consider being a part of this ministry this Advent.

A Note from Julia Moore and Jeanne Rybolt

As we prepare for the Unrehearsed Christmas Pageant we could use some help collecting the following:

Plain sheets/fabric – to make animal costumes and shepherd tunics
Thick yarn for donkey's tails and manes
Robes for the shepherds and innkeepers
Head coverings – scarves, possibly towels, etc
Crowns or something to make them from for the wise peeps
Tinsel for halos and angel adornments
Props (gifts from the wise peeps, staffs, very small flashlights)
Cording/rope to hold head coverings on heads and/or close those robes
Animal costumes (a stretch but thought we'd ask)
Headbands suitable for holding halos
Tulle (I'm dreaming of making at least one camel costume)
Elastic
Velcro
OLD plain light colored t-shirts in various sizes (we'll probably cut them up a bit to make child sized tunics)
Some kind of hanging rod set up
LOTS of prayers

Thanks for your help

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

¹²*When poor people or orphans
cried out for help,
I came to their rescue.*
¹³*And I was highly praised
for my generosity to widows
and others in poverty.*
¹⁴*Kindness and justice
were my coat and hat;*
¹⁵*I was good to the blind
and to the lame.*
¹⁶*I was a father to the needy,
and I defended them in court,
even if they were strangers.*
¹⁷*When criminals attacked,
I broke their teeth
and set their victims free. Job 29:12-17 CEV*

There is an old saying that no good deed goes unpunished, and that is the experience of Job. He has done everything that he ought to have done and yet he finds himself poor, sick and abandoned. Still, he understands that the “Gospel” contained throughout the Old Testament is a call to stand for justice and help and protect those who cannot help themselves. The concept of helping those in need is not some creation of the modern Church but the foundation of all our Christian beliefs about the nature and desire of God.

¹² *“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. Matt 7:12
CEV*

If we are honest with ourselves, how many of us would prefer that those around us treat us with indifference and contempt if we were in need? Might we all not want at least a “hand-up” even if too proud to accept a “hand-out?” Yet the attitude being fostered in many segments of our society is one of disgust and distrust toward the poor. In a sense, poverty has become the modern day version of leprosy. We would prefer to isolate ourselves from those who are poor rather than be involved in their lives. Perhaps we fear catching their “disease” and becoming poor ourselves. But, as Christ notes, the “law and the prophets,” indeed all of scripture, calls us to be in relation with one another. We cannot love God unless we also love one another. And loving one another means seeking to insure the welfare of all, even our enemies and those we despise.

Bible Study

For the last two years I have led a bible study on Thursday mornings. We have recently begun a study of the Book of Psalms. There is room for as many as would like to participate. Please call me if you have questions or simply come and be a part of our study. We meet from 10:00 to 11:30 on Thursday mornings.

I believe that study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

November 17th: Do what is Right: But it's hard to know what is right. Can we at least agree on what is wrong? My texts are Isaiah 65:17–25 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13.

November 24th: Do We Know What We Are Doing Yet? Christ is reported to have said from the Cross, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." It's been 2000 years. Do we have things worked out yet? My texts are Jeremiah 23:1–6 and Luke 23:33–43.

Worship Leaders Schedule

November 17

Julia Moore, **Liturgist**

Betty & Herb Haynes, **Greeters**

Charles Wilson & Linda Robinson, **Ushers**

November 24

Donnie Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Linda Robinson & Pat Moran, **Greeters**

Sam Richardson & Tommy Cotton, **Ushers**

Announcements

You are invited to **"Old School Sunday School"** at **9:45** in the Fellowship Hall. We are singing, praying, studying scripture and caring for one another as we strive to become new people in Christ. Our curriculum is Cokesbury's Adult Bible Studies and our template is Colossians 3:12-17.

"Companions in Christ" gathers at **9:45**. We are talking about how to be better companions to our fellow Christians, discover what our spiritual gifts are, and dig deeper into what we believe and why. Please come and enjoy this time with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. We will meet in the Youth Sunday School room. All are welcome!

You will want to mark your calendar for the **Christmas Cantata, "Canticle of Joy"** which will be presented by the choir and orchestra. This event will take place **Sunday, December 22 at 4:00 PM**.

You are also invited to a reception following the cantata at 5:00 PM.

The **Program Council will meet Thursday, November 14 at 6:00 PM**. Please make plans to attend. The agenda for the meeting will include planning for Christmas-related events as well as planning for 2014.

The SPRC Committee has been authorized to hire a nursery worker for Sunday mornings, but it is unlikely that person will be in place before early December. We need two adults in the Nursery when there are children present. We would like to rotate the volunteers so that the responsibility doesn't fall on the same people every week. **If you would be willing to volunteer to help with the Nursery please contact Rev. Meaker or Judy Richardson.**

Choir Rehearsal: Rehearsal is scheduled for **Wednesday, November 13 at 7:00 PM**.

November Birthdays

Cheryl Wilson, Betty Haynes, Brooks Crowell, Ross Crutcher

Happy Birthday!