**November 13, 2022 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

***Am I Ready?***

**Scripture:** 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 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. (11)For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. (12)Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (13)Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.*

**Notes:**

1. Paul sends this letter to ***clarify*** his intent.
   1. Paul addresses the ***apathy*** that is rampant in the church.
   2. Be ***responsible*** and get back to work.
   3. The one who is unwilling to ***work*** shall not ***eat***.”
2. We need times of ***rest***.
   1. When it is time to ***work***, Christians should jump right in.
   2. We should make the most of our ***talent*** and ***time***,
3. A refusal to do the work disrupts the ***fellowship***.
   1. Use your ***time*** effectively.
   2. How can we ***satisfy*** the hunger we have spiritually?
4. We must be ***FED***.
   1. FED requires us to be ***engaged*** in the ministry of God;
   2. Involved in the ***fellowship*** of believers.
   3. Participating in ***evangelism***.
   4. Engaging in ***discipleship***.
   5. Our spiritual diet must also be in ***balance***.
5. We cannot walk this path ***alone***.
   1. We need ***fellowship***, ***evangelism***, and ***discipleship***.
   2. Be FED, meet ***Christ*** at the table.

**Script:**

Here we are at November 13th. We are heading into the final weeks of 2022; our church elections are next Sunday; Thanksgiving is the following week; the first Sunday of Advent follows on Sunday; and from there it is a blink and a nod before we are at Christmas, then the new year begins. As I think about this past year it all seems like a blur. I wonder, “did I accomplish what I had set out to do?” I have busied myself with so very many things this past year. I helped Shane finish his house, put it on the market and sell it; we moved him to his new home. I was a part of cleaning out my in-law’s basement, constructing an apartment that Jan and I have moved into. Here at the church, I have worked to improve the facilities, in the spring I was a part of making repairs to the pavilion, I have served in my role as Pastor to the best of my ability, ministering to two families who had lost loved ones, performing marriage ceremonies for two couples and each of these families are not a part of this church. I get tired at times, I get frustrated at times, and many times I find myself thinking about retirement, and being able to put all of this work behind me.

Have you ever felt this way, have you ever felt as if you have had enough of the consistent day in day out monotony of the tasks that need to be done. Have you ever felt as if all of your work is in vain, that it is not appreciated, that you’re a cog in the machine? Of course you have, it is part of the human condition. We look at the mountain of tasks that need to be done and wonder how we will ever be able to do it, then despair kicks in, followed by self-pity. Ask me how I know and I will tell you, I have been there. Yet somehow tasks that need to be completed get completed. Have you ever wondered how, or why?

Last week I spoke of putting first things first; this includes nurturing our own spiritual walk. It also includes ministering to our family, our friends, and our community. One day Christ will return, scripture says it will happen in the twinkling of an eye, like a thief in the night, and those who are not right with Christ will be condemned to an eternity in hell. Are you ready, I catch myself asking myself, Am I Ready? We must be about the business of God, that is what we are called to; living in anticipation of his appearance. Today we turn to Paul’s 2nd letter to the Thessalonians. Here Paul shares some thoughts about how we may better be about God’s business. Stand with me as we share in the reading of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.

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Paul is writing to the Thessalonians for at least the second time. Why, you may ask; some of what was sent earlier was distorted and being twisted to confuse the people. Sort of like the political rhetoric we have been bombarded with over the past few years. Paul had written to them earlier to encourage their spiritual growth. comforting and encouraging them; affirming the return of Christ. In fact, his announcement that Christ could come at any time, inspired many to quit working and just wait for the Lord’s return. They rationalized their idleness by pointing to Paul’s own words. The persecution of the church only added fuel to the fire, because many felt that the “day of the Lord” must be near.

So Paul sends off this letter to clarify his intent and their misunderstandings. In this letter he mentions perseverance. He talks about their suffering and how suffering can build character. Then he approaches the subject of Christ's return. He clears up the misunderstanding and then continues to encourage them. He assures them that Christ will be victorious. Then we arrive at our sermon passage today. Paul addresses the idleness of some and the apathy that is rampant in the church. There were those within the congregation, who thought and taught that since Christ’s return was imminent, they should put aside all of their labors, all of their responsibilities, and just wait for the Lord. They quit their work and did not plan for the future in any way. But their lack of busy-ness only led them into sin. They became a burden to their friends, neighbors, and the church. They wasted their time and became busybodies. They may have thought of themselves as being the religious elite and being more spiritual, but Paul tells them to be responsible and get back to work. Being ready for Christ’s return means obeying Him in every aspect and area of life. We know Christ is coming, and we must live in such a way that our faith and our daily practice will please him when he arrives.

Paul was writing here about the person who was not working to their capabilities. He is referring to the persons who were not doing what they were called to do. Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to any of the believers. The rule they followed was, “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” This is the example that he urges the Thessalonians to follow. There’s a difference between leisure and laziness. As adjectives the difference between leisurely and lazy is that leisurely is characterized by a casual attitude; taking abundant time; not hurried while lazy is unwilling to do work or make an effort. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; we need those times of rest. That is why God created the Sabbath. Jesus taught, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) This is also why we find “remember the Sabbath” as a command. But when it is time to work, Christians should jump right in. We should make the most of our talent and time, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Yes you should rest when you should be resting, But you should also work when you should be working.

Paul is telling the Thessalonians to withdraw from those who are not doing what they should. He is talking to the whole congregation, the workers and the slackers. Those who can work should be at work doing what they are called to. Each person must be doing their share to keep the church on mission for God. Those who do not are a bad example and should not benefit. A refusal to do the work disrupts the fellowship especially when there is plenty of work to be done.

As Paul reprimands the church, he is teaching them to settle down and earn the bread they eat. Use your time effectively, stop being lazy, disrupting the fellowship of believers. Get about the work of the Lord, doing good wherever it is needed. And if they are not willing to do the work of the church then we are told to leave them behind, allowing them to go hungry. This hunger and loneliness can be a very effective motivator. I’ve heard people in the past saying I was not being fed at that church They left this house of worship, and congregation of believers, because they were spiritually hungry. So today I ask you, how can we satisfy the hunger we have spiritually? How can we avoid being spiritually hungry?

I have shared this before and I have also used this as our mantra for the past 6 years. The answer is very simple, we must be FED. When our bodies hunger for physical nourishment we eat; we prepare some food, we sit down at the table with the proper utensils, and we consume the food we prepared, we are fed. Likewise when we are hungry spiritually, we also must be fed. The Lord wants each of us to be FED spiritually. To be FED requires us to be engaged in the ministry of God; actively involved in the church and its ministry. This engagement requires us to participate in at least three areas of ministry. These areas of ministry are fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship. And notice if you align the first letter of each word it spells FED.

You must be actively involved in the fellowship of believers within the church. We become friends and confidantes. We share our dreams and desires with each other. We share our hurts and fears with each other. We develop a natural like for each other, and a love for each other that is God-like. We do not have to agree on every opinion but we must be able to live amicably. It is through fellowship that we can become the family of God we have heard of so often. We become the brothers and sisters in Christ that we were meant to be. We work side by side with each other for the betterment of God’s Kingdom. Are you actively engaged in the fellowship of this church?

You must be active participants in Evangelism. Many of you probably feel evangelism is to be performed by a trained member of the clergy. However, the term evangelism means to share the good news. Share the gospel message of the Lord; God loves us so much that he would send his only son to pay the price for our sin which is condemnation to death. And we must turn from our sinful ways, and turn to the Lord, trusting in Jesus for our salvation. Evangelism can be done by anyone who has experienced the life changing power of Jesus. If you claim to be a sinner saved by grace, then you have the power to engage in evangelism. Share what the Lord has done for you. Practice this here in the church when we testify to God’s mercy and grace. If we cannot share here with the fellowship of believers, then how would we be able to share out in the world? Who have you shared your testimony with lately?

You must be an active participant in Discipleship. Many of us know what a disciple is. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ, a person who accepts and assists in the spreading of the good news of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord and are equipped by the Holy Spirit. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit’s prompting to examine their thoughts, words and actions and compare them with the Word of God. This requires that we be in the Word daily—studying it, praying over it, and obeying it. We should also be ready to give testimony of the reason for the hope within us and to disciple others to walk in His way. According to Scripture, being a Christian disciple involves personal growth characterized by the following: **Putting Jesus first in all things (Mark 8:34-38).**  **Following Jesus' teachings (John 8:31-32).**  **Fruitfulness (John 15:5-8).** **Love for other disciples (John 13:34-35), and Evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20).**

That brings us to our diet, no I am not talking about what we eat exactly. The diet we follow in regards to the food we eat is important to our well-being. To be healthy we eat a balanced diet and to keep everything working properly we need exercise. If our diet is out of balance our body will struggle to work properly. Our spiritual diet must also be in balance. We cannot flourish on fellowship alone. We cannot survive on discipleship alone. And we cannot grow on evangelism alone. We need a balance of each of these categories to be what we were meant to be.

So, what does your spiritual diet look like? Are you engaging in the proper amount of fellowship with the body of believers? How often do you engage with the body of believers This needs to be times other than our Sunday morning services Are you engaging in the proper amount of evangelism to those in the community? Who are you sharing the good news with? Have you shared with those who live next door, How about those you work with? Are you engaging in the proper amount of discipleship with others? Who are you learning from? Who are you investing your time in? Discipleship is more than Sunday school classes and bible studies.

As I look around our congregation, I know we can do better; in fact I have noticed an alarming trend. Each week we have more and more people leaving after the morning worship service. People who are not taking advantage of the discipleship activities that are going on in our Sunday School. Some of whom were once teachers of these classes. Also, there are less people attending midweek services. We cannot walk this path alone. We need each other to walk by our sides and encourage, mentor, advise, and spur each other on. We need better fellowship, better evangelism, and better discipleship. You may need to ask yourself, “Am I Ready?

We may not be doing poorly, but I think we could do better. As the family of God we must draw closer together; embracing each other, encouraging each other, lifting each other up when we are down, And spurring each other on. As those who have experienced the salvation God has to offer each of us know the sacrifice that was made for us to come to this saving knowledge. It would be a greater sin if we would withhold it from those who are lost. We must be involved in the evangelism of those who do not know. As believers in Christ, we must be involved in discipleship; striving to learn and walk more in alignment with Christ’s teachings, teaching others what we know and learning from others what they have learned

To be FED, we must meet Christ at the table, and we must pursue all of the opportunities that he offers us in the form of Fellowship, Evangelism, and Discipleship. We must make the effort to be engaged even if it is something we do alone.