**October 29, 2023 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8**

***Sermons We See***

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 NRSV

*(1)You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, (2)but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. (3)For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, (4)but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. (5)As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; (6)nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, (7)though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. (8)So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*

**Notes:**

1. There’s more to the Christian faith than a set of ***doctrines***.

“… *(8)So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*”

* 1. How do we put our faith into ***practice?***

“*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. (Exodus 20:7 NRSV)*”

“*That’s not something you do with your lips (by uttering a profanity), but with your life. You take the name of the Lord in vain when you accept the name of Jesus Christ but don’t do anything with it.*” (The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons, paraphrased)

* 1. The point of the gospel of Jesus Christ is its ***relationships*** and ***interactions***.
  2. As others see Christ in us, they can’t help but be touched by his ***grace*** and ***love***.

1. We become living ***sermons*** – ***sermons*** you see.

“*… fear of the Lord, to watch over their education, that they be not led astray; to direct their youthful mind to the Holy Scriptures, and their feet to the sanctuary; to restrain them from evil associates and habits; and, as much as in you lies, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*”

* 1. ***Children*** learn about being a child of God by the way people care for them.
  2. A greater lesson is learned by the way the church ***fulfills*** its part of this ***covenant***.
  3. The ***sermon*** people see in our actions has a great impact.
  4. Seeing the bible story ***lived has*** an even greater impact.

“*So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*”

1. Our most effective ***witness*** of ***faith*** is what we do.
   1. We’re called to be living ***sermons***; ***sermons*** you see.
   2. Our sermon demonstrates our ***faith***, ***hope***, and ***love*** of God,
   3. Our sermon demonstrates how that ***faith***, ***hope***, and ***love***, is able to overcome our struggles.

**Script:**

I have watched and studied the actions, the Christian walk, of many people. Not that I may judge them, but so I can see the things that display a Christian walk and attitude and sometimes see the things that detract from a person’s Spiritual witness. People are watching constantly, yes some may judge, but most will see the walk we walk as an example of our faith, an example of what we truly believe and the convictions we hold close to our hearts.

People are constantly observing the people and actions that are going on around them. From what they observe, they will make judgment calls on what actions they want to duplicate and which actions they wish to avoid. Last week I shared that many times we are the only example of Scripture, of Jesus many people will ever see.

Take a look around whose actions and Christian walk would you like to emulate. Who has impressed you with their actions, words, and attitude, that you desire to be like them. Today in our passage we find Paul writing to the Thessalonians once again in chapter 2 verses 1-8. Her the inspired words of Paul speaking to the church in Thessalonica.

*1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 NRSV (1)You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, (2)but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. (3)For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, (4)but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. (5)As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; (6)nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, (7)though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. (8)So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*

There’s more to the Christian faith than a set of doctrines. The First Letter to the Thessalonians is the first letter of the New Testament Paul wrote. He wrote it around 52 A.D. He’d come to Thessalonica from Philippi, where he and Silas had been put in jail. He only stayed in Thessalonica for three weeks, but he left a lasting impression; so much so, that when he sent Timothy back to see how they were doing, Timothy reported that they were standing fast in the faith. His preaching had taken hold.

And do you know what gets my attention; how much could Paul have taught these converts, the Thessalonians, in only three weeks? That’s barely enough time to skim the surface. The answer lies in the last verse of the passage for today: “… *(8)So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.*” This is the idea I would like you to understand this morning; there’s more to the Christian faith than a set of doctrines. What’s important is how we put our faith into practice, so as to teach others, by example.

There is a musical called the Cotton Patch Gospel. It is inspired by Clarence Jordan. He uses the language of the deep south, and he shares this third commandment, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. (Exodus 20:7 NRSV)” But Jordan explains it this way. “*That’s not something you do with your lips (by uttering a profanity), but with your life. You take the name of the Lord in vain when you accept the name of Jesus Christ but don’t do anything with it.*” (The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons, paraphrased) The point of the gospel of Jesus Christ in more than words; it’s relationships and interactions – living the faith in covenant and community with each other. The Good News is, as others see Christ in us and feel his presence, they can’t help but be touched by his grace and love. We become living sermons – sermons you see, rather than sermons you hear.

I can think of no better example than the one that was made on the day we had so many parents bringing their children forward and dedicating these children to the Lord. Do you remember the words and the covenant they made with the Lord that day? I explained that it is the duty of parents to “*… fear of the Lord, to watch over their education, that they be not led astray; to direct their youthful mind to the Holy Scriptures, and their feet to the sanctuary; to restrain them from evil associates and habits; and, as much as in you lies, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” And after explaining this I asked if they would endeavor to do so with God’s help; to which they responded that they would. In our dedication service parents promised to do their best to raise their children to know the Lord.

But an even greater covenant was made when I asked you as members of this congregation if you would support and encourage these parents in the pursuit of these things to which we responded, we will. I do not have to tell you that these children will learn far more about what it means to be a child of God and disciple of Jesus Christ by the way their parents care for them. But the even greater lesson will be learned by the way we fulfill our part of this covenant; how we live our Christian faith for them to see.

The way we interact with them will set the tone and demonstrate the love of Jesus in far greater ways than any book, sermon, or Sunday School lesson may ever do. It is the sermon they see in our actions that has the greater impact upon their lives. Bible stories are great, but seeing the bible story lived out in front of them, will have an even greater impact. Mark my words; the way we interact and demonstrate the love of Christ to one another will help our children grow in the knowledge of God in a far greater way.

Paul said, “ *(8)So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us*.” In much the same way, our strongest, most effective witness of faith is not what we say, but what we do – by the way we work and play and worship together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We’re called to be living sermons – sermons you see – as we live out our faith in relationship with God and each other, day by day. Looking back over the many ways you’ve grown in your own faith and understanding, who are some of the “living sermons” you’ve known?

I remember men and women of this church who have had a lasting impact on my life. Some of whom are still with us. Ray Carson always had a word of testimony for his love of Jesus and what Jesus means to me. I can repeat any verbatim, but I know many times they would start in this way, “I want to share what Jesus means to me…” Ray would share how Jesus saved him, how he witnessed to numerous people in his position at the nursing home; and how much it means to him that Jesus would love him enough to go to the cross. To me it wasn’t so much what I heard him say, but how he carried himself, the humility and sincerity that he would share when he spoke. It was the commitment he had for serving the Lord that helped me structure the things I feel are most important in my life. Ray taught me what it means to be a humble servant and to be sincere in my appreciation for His love. Ray taught and continues to teach me what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, not by what he said, but by how he lives out his faith each day.

Then there is Tom Miller, Tom had a strong voice and when he spoke you listened. I remember attending board meetings when he shared his opinions in very strong ways. He had a way of speaking that was very intimidating. His voice, when he spoke from his convictions, was loud and strong, with the command of a general. But it was the Tom I saw outside of the church building and board meetings that demonstrated to me his love of God, and how to be a man of God, and how to follow your convictions. He cared, he loved to talk with people and he was very knowledgeable. In my last visit with Tom, he didn’t want to talk about his health issues. Jan and I had just returned from our vacation where we were rear-ended by a pickup on our motorcycle. He wanted to talk about my health and Jan’s health. He wanted to know that we were ok. He cared for the people of this church and always did what he could, without seeking any type of recognition. He did not desire the attention of the masses but only was concerned with the well being of those he held dear.

I could go on and share with you the names of people who have helped form me into who I am in my walk with the Lord. It would be like naming the honor roll of this church. I want to share that many of you are on this list. But I know in my heart that mentioning your names may embarrass you. But here is the greatest point I would like to make today. The gospel of Jesus Christ is more than words; It’s relationships and interactions – living the faith in covenant and community with each other – being honest and real and vulnerable to each other – so that, as others see Christ in us and feel His presence, they are touched by his grace and love. We become living sermons – sermons you see, rather than sermons you hear.

This is nothing new, I did not come up with this idea, in fact a man named Edgar Guest put pen to paper and expressed it this way:

***Sermons We See***  
by  
Edgar Guest

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;   
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.   
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,   
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;   
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,   
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;   
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.   
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,   
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;   
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,   
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.   
When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind   
Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me   
To become as big and thoughtful as I know that friend to be.   
And all travelers can witness that the best of guides today   
Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.

One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;   
One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.   
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,   
For right living speaks a language which to every one is clear.   
Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,   
I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one, any day.

What does your life demonstrate? I have said this before and I will repeat it over and over again, “If your life is a sermon, what is it saying?” Who are you reaching?

We are called to preach a sermon every day. Our sermon demonstrates our faith, it demonstrates what it means to be a follower of Christ and the hope we have in Him, it demonstrates our love of God, and it demonstrates how that faith, hope, and love, through the work of the Holy Spirit, is able to overcome our struggles. The sermons we live are the ways that we let the beauty of Jesus be seen in each of us.