

"Entrusted & Encouraged With Great Expectations"

October 25, 2020; 10:00 am

I Thessalonians 2:1-8

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 You yourselves know, brothers and sisters,^[a] 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^[b] 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.

The Uproar in Thessalonica

17 After Paul and Silas^[a] had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. **2** And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, **3** explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah^[b] to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah,^[c] Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." **4** Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. **5** **But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar.** While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. **6** When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers^[d] before the city authorities,^[e] shouting, "**These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also,** **7** and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus." **8** The people and the city officials were disturbed when they heard this, **9** and after they had taken bail from Jason and the others, they let them go.

I. GOOD TROUBLE

Paul and Silas are stirring it up! Again. Basically, their whole ministry—spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and starting new churches—is one of stirring up Good Trouble!

This was not a state-sanctioned organization—by any means! There was no “separation of church and state” in that day, because the church WAS the state. The Emperor was God, and King, and Divine, and no living citizen said anything else or worshiped any other Lord.

They are shamefully mistreated wherever they go, accused of treason and worse, yet they persist. They persevere in spreading the news of a loving God—not a judgmental, authoritarian Lord—but a personal Being who wants to be in love and relationship with his people.

Now, in today’s passage, Paul is telling the Thessalonians about how things had not been pretty in Philippi, but that doesn’t mean the church there, and here, still kept at the good work and kept the faith.

If you’re curious about these amazing adventures of Paul, Silas, and all the women who were in the movement with them against all odds, read the Book of Acts. Good homework!

Chapter 17 of Acts tells the story of how the “Good Trouble” got started in Thessalonica—the background to our Epistle message today.

In a nutshell, they came to the city, began to teach and preach and share the gospel of love in the synagogue. Some liked what they heard and some didn’t. Some were intrigued by this Messiah, Jesus, who came

preaching love and healing and sharing, and some didn’t.

The ones who didn’t formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They searched out Paul and Silas and attacked the house of the man, Jason, who was harboring them. Smashed his yard signs and spray painted intimidating messages on the walls.

They even dragged Jason out into the town square, out to the authorities, along with some other believers, and accused them of treason to the Emperor.

“These people have been turning the world upside down!”

II. HAVE GOOD COURAGE

I’ll let you read the Rest of the Story to find out what happens after that. The crux of the matter, says Paul, is this:

It wasn’t easy! We met opposition! But we proclaimed the gospel of God with courage in spite of that! We suffered and were shamefully mistreated. But, we acted out of pure motives. We knew our message was right. And just. And “the right thing to do.” Though we were questioned and challenged!

“We have been ENTRUSTED/approved by God, with the message of the gospel.

We too, in our place and time; in our church and community, have been entrusted with the Gospel message of Love.

And thus, we have to be clear within ourselves what our convictions are. Not a party platform or what our favorite news channel says.

What is the Truth? the gospel of love? That God has placed in and upon our hearts. If our hearts are tested by God what is found there?

En-COURAGE-ment –

I love how the word “encouragement” has the word “courage” in the middle of it.

In the scriptures, these words: encouragement, courage, boldness and faith all tie together. They are used almost interchangeably, and all convey God’s expectation for how we are to live, move and have our being *in* God, in faith, with courage—fighting our fears and not being afraid to stand up for love and life.

2293 *tharséō* (from the root *thar* – *bolstered* because *warmed up*," derived from **2294** /*thársos*, "emboldened from within")—properly, bolstered *within* which supports unflinching courage—literally, to *radiate warm confidence*(exude "social boldness") because *warm-hearted*.

/*tharséō* ("emboldened to show courage") refers to *God bolstering the believer*, empowering them with a *bold inner-attitude* (to be "of good courage").

For the believer, *tharséō* ("showing boldness") is the result of God *infusing* God’s strength by the Spirit’s inworking of *faith* ("inbirthed persuasion," **4102** /*pístis*). Showing this unflinching, bold courage means living out the *inner confidence* (*inner bolstering*) that is Spirit-produced.

So, with the Spirit’s infusion, we can follow that commandment, with faith, to: 'have confidence, courage, be unafraid,'

parakaleó: (par-ak-al-eh'-o) **to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage. A verb!**

3870 *parakaléō* (from **3844** /*pará*, "from close-beside" and **2564** /*kaléō*, "to call") – properly, "make a call" from being "close-up and personal." **3870**/*parakaléō* ("personally make a call") refers to believers *offering up evidence that stands up in God's court*.

Same root as Paraclete!! The Holy Spirit. The Advocate. The Comforter. The One who comes after Jesus has left the disciples, who comes at Pentecost, and is here still. Walking among us, infusing us with courage. Advocating on our behalf in the cause of the Gospel.

God filled us with Courage. Absolutely! God fills us with courage, encouragement, strength to be bold in sharing the gospel of love. In spite of turbulent times. In spite of intimidating and unkind opposition.

God says, “I send for you, summon, invite, beseech, entreat, beg....AND, I comfort, encourage, and console. We are not left alone to carry out God’s expectations of us!

III. STORIES OF COURAGE

A. MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD—ALL!

Let me tell you a story about courage—of a young boy, the family who adopted him after years of abuse and homelessness in the foster system, and how they

choose to keep on laying down their lives for animals who need them, because they “get it.” They understand that no age or stage of life is less important in the eyes of God. No one is a cast off.

Ernesto Murguía

September 30 at 5:17 PM

Well, today didn't go as we hoped but it's in the hardest of times we learn the best lessons and feel the most gratitude. Buffy (a little white curly dog) was scheduled to have her teeth cleaned and removed today but Dr. Mac had a gut feeling she needed to look at some lab work before putting her under anesthesia. She was right; Buffy showed signs of advanced kidney failure so anesthesia was not an option and as a family we decided that the kindest and most loving thing to do would be to let her go before she lost her will to live and stopped eating and drinking.

I wouldn't have dreamed of leaving Robbie out of this decision or not allowing him to be part of the entire process so I immediately went and picked him up from school. On the way there he told me he wanted to be the one to hold her when she went to heaven. And of course, I gave him that honor. On the way home I told him how proud I was of him for understanding the importance of caring for old animals and helping to make sure they never, ever suffer.

This is what he said...

(And for those of you who don't know, Robbie was adopted from the foster care system after *years* of severe abuse and neglect.)

"I know how it feels not to be loved or cared for and I don't want any animal of mine to ever feel that way. It's only sad

for *us* when they go to heaven. It's a happy day for them. Thank you for being proud of me. Are you ok, Mom?"

From the mouths of babes.

(As our story is being shared more and more I feel like I need to add a little more context and also give you a deeper glimpse into the heart of my son. We adopt senior dogs. Robbie LOVES adopting senior dogs.

He is sadly aware that the longer a child remains in foster care the less likely they are to be adopted. He told me once **"if all you guys had wanted was a baby, you would have never gotten me."** He relates to our "old people" (that's what we call our senior dogs) in much the same way. He has also reminded me on several occasions that it doesn't matter how long you have something for how much you love it. I asked him what he meant and he said **"well you've only known me for two years but you love me like it's been forever."** Yes, my son is the coolest.)

Credit: Maria Henry G

B. BRAVE CONVERSATIONS

Another place where courage is showing up, is in our own congregation. We are having “brave space” conversations. Listening to one another and dialoguing in ways we have not done before.

Hearing one another's hearts, not just opinions. Challenging unhealthy patterns from the past in order to move boldly into God's preferred present and vital future for us.

We are talking honestly, apologizing for things done and not done, stood on firm ground or dug in our

heels, understood differently or misunderstood—intentionally and completely innocently.

A spiritual director friend put this poetically: we can pause long enough, to silence the inner-narrative of self-justification; and be willing to say, "I'm sorry, I wish I had done that differently..

We are being courageous together—as church. Especially in these unprecedented COVID times and humanity's unrest with climate change and injustice.

"Be Strong and courageous. Do not be afraid."

God's message to us throughout the entirety of the Bible—not just from Paul!

C. DOWN ON THE CORNER

I saw evidence of such courage "down at the corner" last weekend. Every Saturday morning for awhile now, there have been "rallies" at the main intersection in Buena Vista. The spirit of these rallies has not be overtly violent, but it has been "charged."

Visiting guests to our town of color have been in tears when confronted by messages of white supremacy. Locals of a different political persuasion than the demonstrators have been yelled at in their car windows and accused of "not caring for their country" because of their stance on equality for all.

Another group has responded by coming later to the intersection, and holding up signs that say: Love. Be a Kind Person. Love is Love. Black Lives Matter. Hate

has no Home Here. You might know some of those folks—they are your friends and neighbors.

(I am sad to say our yard sign, proclaiming "Hate Has No Home Here" has been kicked down a couple nights this week. We just pick it up, dust it off and put it more firmly in the ground again.)

After we finished recording the sermon last Saturday, I stopped down at the library to pick up a movie on racism for our discussions here. I decided to walk down and offer some moral support for the courageous folks on the corner and take their pictures. I loved their signs about love and countering the earlier message of hate.

I happened to have my pastor's stole on still. My favorite one that says: "Do Justice. Love Kindness. Show Mercy."

On one corner I made a new friend. She introduced herself and then asked what the heck that stole was. I said, "I'm a pastor, and this is a sacred stole that I wear for preaching. I just recorded a sermon for our YouTube worship."

"What church?" she asked. I said, "The Congregational Church. The one over there by the Post Office." "Oh! That church! That's the only church that really does anything."

Hmmm....remember our passage from last week? In the chapter in First Thessalonians before this one? "Word has gotten out about you!

⁷⁻¹⁰ Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Spirit's Word, not only in

the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—*you're* the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms.

God expects us, exhorts us to be our “Better, Braver Angels.”

THESIS: God expects us to have courage because God PUTS courage in us and among us.

I should add, that as we stood there at the corner, a cyclist sped by and yelled, “You all are full of - it!” I just smiled behind my mask, and said, “No, we're not!”

And Greg Kettering held up his sign that said, “Love is Love” on one side and “Be a Kind Person” on the other. And, we carried on. The number of people honking, cheering, smiling and giving the thumbs up far outweighed the catcalls like the cyclist's. We were encouraged. Heartened.

IV. Finally, dear Beloved Community:

A love letter, an Encouraging Epistle, from the Apostle Paul, to the Church at Buena Vista. At Pueblo, at Denver, at Grand Junction—to all churches, united and dispersed throughout all of Colorado and beyond:

(EPPERLY translation):

I beseech you, brothers and sisters, in this turbulent time and season, to “please God” rather than humans. When we love God and let our love for God determine our behavior and values, everything else falls into place. Then we can be bold in doing something beautiful for God, something that will endure from generation to generation.

In pleasing God instead of humans and egos, we help create a world that mirrors God's values: we enable God to be more active in our lives and in the world. We share ourselves, that is, make our lives a gift to others. We make our mission a contribution to the beauty of the earth, giving and receiving love in every encounter, and healing the world one moment at a time.

In our divisive society, we remember that there is another way. A path that honors diversity but asks us to act in accordance with higher and more transcendent values. To challenge and protest, to affirm our viewpoint, while seeing the holiness in others. Pleasing God means letting God's way, the way of inclusion and hospitality, guide our decision-making and relationships in an increasingly divided world.

May it be so with us, Beloved brothers and sisters, Amen.