

October 16, 2011  
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Pentecost 18 (Proper 24 A)  
Discipleship: An Example

*Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today we continue our journey through what being a disciple is all about. Two weeks ago we began our journey by looking at the parable of the tenants and how working in a vineyard is part of our role as disciples. Last we looked at the Parable of the Wedding Feast and in our lives as disciples there is no room for excuses. This week we move to looking at a group of people that are an example of discipleship.

There is a lot more to this discipleship thing that we will hear about over the next few weeks, but this church in Thessalonica is an example of what true disciples actually are. We hear it in Paul's words to them, his thanksgiving to them for their faith and example.

Thessalonica before AD 51 was full of heathen gentiles. They were pagans...they worshipped other idols. Paul, Silas and Timothy brought the message of Jesus Christ to this group of heathen gentiles...and by with their lips and through the Holy Spirit...the message spread, people were converted, believers were welcomed into the Lord's family. In Scripture we learn that they weren't in Thessalonica very long...so even in an infancy stage, the church was left alone...but through God's overabundance of grace they grew, their faith could be seen, one could really see their lives of disciples bursting forth. And of course just like any other church that is full of sinners, they had their issues...but they remained faithful to the Word of God.

Hear again the Word of God from 1 Thessalonians: *"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father, your work of faith and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you."* Amazing words by Paul to the church in Thessalonica. If Paul would come here to this place today...would he say these exact words a short time later?

To be honest I don't think he would. Of course he would give thanks to God for all of you...because you have been baptized into Christ...you participate in the Lord's Supper. And because of that you are chosen by God. What is our work of faith here? What is our labor of love? What is our steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you realize that the church in Thessalonica was persecuted for their faith...but yet they remained strong? Here in this place...persecution is not as it was for the church in 51 AD. Even without that persecution we are very much slow to confess our faith and live it out in love.

You will probably get tired of me speaking about discipleship during this time, but my family of God, we are spiritually lazy. We are spiritually lax. It's one thing that generally Lutherans are good at. We hear sermons all the time on how Jesus Christ did everything for you for your salvation. Which is true as we hear in Luther's explanation of the third article of the creed...I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength

believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but it is the Holy Spirit that has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps me in the one Holy Christian Church.

Did you hear the word? Gifts...what do you do with gifts? Do you just gently shove them into the closet and never use them? Do you put them under the bed to never be heard of again? Or do you throw them away because you don't care about them? Gifts are meant to be used and God gives us many gifts...he gives us His Word, He gives us Sacraments-Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He gives us our faith. He gives us a place to worship him. But as Lutherans we tend to make the excuse that since God does everything for us, we don't have to do anything. That isn't the case...God calls us by the gospel...he chooses us, but we aren't there just to sit back and enjoy the ride...

We get into the attitude of...I don't need to come to church, I don't need to read my Bible, I don't need to come to Bible Study, I don't need to talk about my faith with others, I don't need to be concerned about another's faith. I don't need to be a lifelong learner in Jesus Christ.

But that attitude was not the attitude in Thessalonica...for Paul speaks about their work of faith, their labor in love, their steadfastness in hope. It wasn't their own doing though. The Holy Spirit was involved he was moving them...because God chose them.

Hear again more of the Word of God from Thessalonians 1, *"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."*

Jesus does deliver us from the wrath of God, and he will never leave you nor forsake you. But we can leave him...we can forsake him.

Peter in his first letter speaks about our status with God...*"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellence of him who call you out of darkness and into his marvelous light."* Our works of faith are grounded in His Word and Sacraments. When we live by faith we are living by His Word we are living as His disciples.

Our lives in Christ remind of a story I read about two butterflies:

Two butterflies—colorful and majestic Monarchs—sat side by side on a tree limb. Beside them was the ruptured cocoon from which they'd just emerged. "Come fly with me," said the one.

“Caterpillars can’t fly,” said the other.

“But we’re not caterpillars anymore,” said the first, flexing his new wings, stretching them their full span till they looked like magnificently crafted stained glass windows. “Those caterpillar days are gone forever.”

“Don’t be silly,” said the other. “We were born caterpillars and we’ll always be caterpillars. That’s the way it is.”

“Well, then, why did the Creator see fit to give us these wings?” said the one.

The other butterfly thought for a moment and then replied, “I don’t know. Some sort of cruel joke, I suppose. He did the same thing to the ostrich, you know.”

“Nonsense!” said the first. “Look at all the other butterflies. They’re flying. What do you say to that?”

The second butterfly looked over the meadow and said, “They’re not flying. They’re just being blown in the wind. Stupid of them, too. Can’t they see it’s dangerous? Easy prey for hungry birds and, when they land, mischievous children as well. I’ll stick to crawling and climbing, thank you very much. It may be slow, but it’s safe and sure.”

“It may be safe and sure but it’s...well, it’s not natural. Butterflies fly!!!! That’s the way the creator made us. That’s our role, our function, our fit: to dance on the wings of the air; to play tag with dandelion seeds; to soar; to dart; to float; to light on a single blade of grass to the delight of all who see; to inspire and awe; to fascinate; to add a note of grace to this world’s dreary song.”

It’s not natural for butterflies to crawl and climb. Like butterflies, it’s not natural for churches to crawl either. We are created by our creator to add a note of grace to this world’s dreary song. We are created to live for him. We are created to share the promise of life. God gives us gifts, he gives them to us so that we may use them. We can only use them by his grace...grace given to us through His Son Jesus Christ who lives and dies for you...He is the one that provides us with courage...he is the one that provides with the Holy Spirit, so that we can be transformed.

Jesus Christ along with the Holy Spirit is the one that transform you. They transformed Thessalonica. They can transform you too into a people that is full of faith...full of the labor in love and the steadfastness of hope. Jesus Christ along with the Holy Spirit can empower you to be the disciples that you are called to be, that you are chosen to be.

In the name of Jesus! Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*