

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Today Paul continues his words about the “imitators” in Thessalonica. Paul says that he knows what they are doing and saying because the Christians from other cities are telling him all about what has happened in Thessalonica and about how the Thessalonians even feel about Paul. Apparently the grapevine, gossip mill, or whatever you want to call it, worked as well two thousand years ago as it does now.

Isn't it amazing that the news that Paul received from others about the church in Thessalonica was so good? How often have we all thought “Oh, oh” when someone began their conversation with “I've heard a lot of things about your church and your pastor.” We automatically begin preparing a defense strategy before any more words leave our companion's mouth. The people in the Thessalonian church, however, were excited, very excited about God and all that He had done in their lives and in the life of Paul. Since that was what had become central in their lives, that is what they shared with their friends and neighbors. They didn't have time to consider what things might be going wrong, or not to their liking, in the new church.

Thessalonica was not a perfect church, but the primary witness of the church was one of faith and love. Over and over both Paul and Jesus cited the importance of loving one another and forgiving one another no matter what the circumstance. To do otherwise leads to divisive behavior and a bad witness to the world.

Paul was like a delighted father about the church that he had helped begin. It pleased him that the young congregation was demonstrating the gospel to the people that they met. Paul was not the only “father” rejoicing. God is the ultimate Father of us all and the Father of our churches. He rejoices when our faith is a fire within us; when we are too consumed with the goodness of the gospel to worry about our egos or our personal wants and preferences; when we share the Good News by the lives that we live.

Learn more about living the gospel in a Bible study this week.
A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

23rd Sunday after Pentecost

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

1. Where is the resurrection of Jesus emphasized in these verses? What difference had the resurrection made in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians?
2. Whom had the Thessalonians imitated? Who is the Source for all imitation? (1 Corinthians 11:1)
3. For whom were the Thessalonians models? What did they model?

For Family Reflection

4. Conversion begins with confessing and forsaking idols. What are some of the idols of our lives? To Whom do we turn?
5. Who are some of the Christians that you would like to imitate? (They may be Bible characters or they may be people from your family or your church.)
6. What does it mean for us to be faith models for others? For whom could your family be a model of faith and devotion?

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 22:15-22

The question guaranteed trouble for Jesus. Would He answer that the Jews should only pay tribute to God, endangering Himself with Rome, or would He urge tribute to Caesar and anger His Jewish followers? His smiling enemies only wondered which of the two possible condemning answers Jesus would choose. Jesus chose neither, demonstrating Himself once again to be a master in debating His enemies.

The question of allegiance continues in our own time. Questions of Christian response to the Nazi “church” of the late 1930s are an example. The swastika replaced the cross in many German Lutheran churches in the dark days of Nazi control. Today churches wrestle with issues such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, etc. The world’s answer to the question of Christian involvement throughout history has been, “Leave us alone and stay in your building.”

Jesus offers us a simple guide for acting in our world. Give to “Caesar” his taxes and lawful obedience, give *yourself* to God. We may be sojourners in this world, but we are here with an assignment to make a difference by being and making disciples of our Lord.

When Paul was witnessing in the city of Ephesus, magicians who came to faith burned their books of magic. Idol makers complained that they were losing money since so many people were turning to the true God. Paul didn’t cause these things by changing laws or by cursing his enemies, or by violent means. To Paul, giving himself to God meant spreading the Truth of Jesus Christ.

The whole violent, pagan Roman Empire became Christian, not by falling to Christian armies, but by giving in to Christian truth, faith and love. Honest Christ-centered love can change the world.

As we look around our world today we must meet the problems, sins, needs, and all the other things that seem so insane, with the good news of Jesus Christ. Love will crush evil more effectively than hatred, accusation, or condemnation. No, it isn’t easy or often instantly effective. Nero and Domitian did toss Christians into the arenas for execution, much as is done in parts of our world today. But, ultimately love will prevail. It was Jesus’ Love that saved us, not His Justice.

Are you in a weekly Bible study?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Twenty-Third Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 22:15-22

1. What was the “trap” (vs. 15) that the Pharisees tried to set in the conversation with Jesus? What was their “evil intent” (vs. 18)? Did they succeed?
2. What did “Caesar” represent?
3. What about Jesus “amazed” (vs. 22) His listeners? Were they amazed with God’s plan of salvation and Jesus mission to save sinners?

For Family Reflection

4. How do we “give to Caesar” today? How do we give to God?
5. What does it mean to be a Christian citizen? How and when do the church and government support each other? How do they maintain separate and distinct roles? What role should the Christianity play in politics?
6. Has anyone ever tried to “trap” you by questioning your faith or your involvement in church? What do we learn from Jesus on how to respond?

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 12:38-44

What is more important—to promote your beliefs, or God’s clear word; to show your faith, or show off your faith?

Jesus often severely criticized the teachers of God’s people. They supposedly had studied God’s word, yet they rejected His Son and tried to discredit Him. Finally, they participated in plotting His death. They did this in order to protect their own opinions about the way to God.

Satan continues to use any and all who are willing to discredit his enemy, God. Satan is as busy today as he was when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness and used religious leaders to persecute Jesus. Satan said to Eve “You will be like God.” Today he convinces many that “You are gods.”

Verses 41-44 answer our second question. Jesus notes that the rich gave out of their wealth, but the poor widow gave all that she had to God.

As American Christians, we can learn from these verses in a couple of ways. No matter how poor we feel, and some of us feel pretty poor these days, we are among the wealthiest people in the world. As we give to God’s work, we often give liberally so that everyone knows how good we are, but when times are tough do we give as the widow did? Do we really trust God to provide?

We can also look at the example of the widow in a spiritual way. Do we, the most independent and powerful people in the world, trust God because times are good? Do we still trust Him in the bad times, or do we tend to take back our trust and place it in ourselves? These are questions that we must take to God, and honor His answers in our hearts and in our actions. In all times, we are blessed to give because God gave His Son for us.

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 12:38-44

1. Who were the scribes? How were the actions of the scribes different from their words?
2. The deeds of the widow (vs. 41-42) offered a contrast to those of the scribes. How did the widow show her faith?
3. In what sense did the widow give more (vs. 43) than the other contributors?

For Family Response

4. How and through whom has God given you everything? (see John 3:16)
5. What does it mean to give everything away (vs. 44) like the widow did?
6. The story of the widow’s offering is a wonderful stewardship story. What does it mean to be a faithful steward? How can you be a steward in your family? In your congregation?