



“Living with Gratitude: Serve”

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, November 16–17, 2019
The Reverend John H. Brock
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

It's been a bit of a week in the Brock household, although quite probably not for the reasons some of you are thinking. At the risk of sharing too much information, many of you are aware that my mother moved here to central PA just a few years ago. After she and my father both retired, they took care of both of his parents, until they both passed, and then, eventually, my parents moved to Florida. They lived there for several years. My dad passed away. Mom chose to stay in FL with all her friends and doctors. But then she had a stroke, and decided she wanted to live closer to family. Her choices were here, in central PA, or up in northern WI, near my sister. After seventeen years of FL weather, I think Mom's rationale was pretty good: “Winters are probably warmer in PA than they are in WI.”

So, Mom has been here now for about two and a half years. She joined Trinity and has met and become friends with many of you. For that, I am very thankful. My sister came to visit last week, which she has done rather frequently the last couple of years. I need to add that I feel our parents have been very good about treating the two of us equally, especially concerning finances. They have, in my opinion, at times gone more than fair in making certain one is does not receive more than the other (there really is a point to all this, trust me).

Anyway, I'm hugging my sister goodbye out in the parking lot - she was going to catch a flight in the morning - and she says to me, “Thank you, for all you do for Mom.” Because I **do** strive serve Mom in a lot of ways: I handle her finances, and do her laundry; get her to her doctor appointments; I nag my son to make certain he's awake on Sunday mornings to bring his grandmother to Trinity for worship. We go out to eat just about any time that she wants to. I try to get over to her apartment several times a week; and those days I can't get there I really try to make certain I give her a call. I'm not trying to pat myself on the back or get accolades from any of you - these are simply some of the ways that I strive to serve my Mom.

So, my sister says to me, “Thank you for everything you do for Mom.” To which I, as the snarky younger brother that I am, respond: “I'm getting three quarters of the inheritance.”

That's a long build up to our lesson from 2 Thessalonians. But I think they **do** tie together. See, the folks in Thessalonica, like all believers, were waiting for Jesus to return, to come

back, to get them and bring them to heaven. That whole idea usually goes by the Greek word "parousia" (**parousia**). They expected it to happen soon. Like, "before the end of the year" soon; or "by month's end" soon; or even, "before lunch" soon. Because a lot of these believers had been alive at least when Jesus was killed, they all pretty much thought he was going to return in their lifetime. When they remembered what Jesus had said, things like what we heard in the gospel lesson, and they looked around at the things that were happening, the people got excited, because they thought Jesus' words were being fulfilled. They were expectant. They were waiting for Jesus to be here. Right. Now.

That attitude got so pervasive in the congregation there in Thessalonica, that people quit their jobs. They stopped their normal, everyday activities, and simply sat around, waiting. They stopped doing things like paying the bills, doing the laundry, going to their jobs and earning a wage, because what good was money going to do them? They were waiting. Waiting for Jesus to come back. Waiting for Jesus to bring them joy and peace. Maybe they were waiting to sit around playing harps all day.

While they waited, with no jobs, not doing anything to help others, they did what a lot of humans who are doing nothing do, which is: gossip; goof off; **not** be helpful. And, perhaps worse, they started depending on those fewer and fewer believers who **were** still working, those who were still earning a wage, still bringing in money to pay for food and clothing and shelter.

So, Paul had to do some dope slapping. *Knock it off*, Paul says. *You didn't learn this from us. Get your act together, and at the very least, support yourself* (this is the Brock paraphrase - actual translations may vary)

For Paul, if you are *able*, then you are *called*. For Paul, if you have the *ability*, then you have the *duty*.

We do know that not all of us are called to do everything. We are each of us gifted differently. What I understand Paul to mean here is that if you are able to serve the Lord in whatever capacity you are talented in, then that's what you are called to be doing.

Conversely, if you have talent and/or ability, and *aren't* doing anything, or worse, sitting around purposefully **not** serving, then . . . **seriously**? You call yourself a believer, yet you sit around, idly chatting, not doing anything to help yourself, or worse, not help those in need?

Paul said:

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. (V10)

This does not mean, though, that we have to be doing big, showy, venues of faith.

We can serve in all kinds of ways. We can serve by helping our family members. "Help those in need" maybe means that we can go to the area ravaged by the wildfire, or damaged by the hurricane, or striving to dig out from the flood, and help those folks literally rebuild. It can also mean, you go to those areas, and help provide meals. or give childcare, while others more able do the actual, physical rebuilding. Maybe it

means you stay here at home, but that you head up, or help with, a campaign at home to raise funds, clothing food for those who have lost it all, or for those who are aiding in the rebuilding.

It can mean that you serve God, you witness to your faith, by being a lector during worship, or assist with communion. Maybe you share your talent on a musical instrument, or help cook, or clean up, in the kitchen when we have one of our meals. To "work" in Paul's sense can mean you tutor a child; visit someone who can't get out anymore; grocery shop for a member recovering from surgery.

And don't tell me you're too old, and you can't get out. You can always pick up a phone and call folks, tell them you're thinking about them, offer up a word of encouragement, or just a friendly ear. Don't tell me you're too young, either. You can always be a friend to that kid at school who doesn't have any friends.

All of us are capable of doing, of serving, God. Somehow, some way. To serve God takes many different forms.

Which one is yours?

Amen.

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