

A Pentecost 24 2007 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In the spirit of Thanksgiving week, I would like you to take a minute and turn to your neighbor and tell them about someone who has encouraged you. (if you are new, I probably should say we don't do this every week but sometimes I ask a question to get us thinking about the sermon topic) So now tell someone about who has encourage you, anyone. When you were little, recently, at home, at work, with words, with actions...don't leave anyone without a partner....

*30 sec.*

Okay, Is anyone willing to share?

*Share my example, if necessary.*

*30 some years ago, when I was an intern at St. Tim's in Menasha, Dottie Van Loo, an amazing woman of faith, wasn't one of those people who gushed over my every sermon or bible study, but one day, near the end of my internship she bought me my first clergy shirt. It was her way of saying I could do it. Her encouragement continued in many small ways throughout my ministry but that shirt always reminded me that someone thought I could do it.*

Pastor Dewey reminded us last week that we are at the end of the church year, preparing for Christ the King Sunday and then Advent. And so, all of our texts have an end-times theme. That is certainly true today. Psalm 90 reminds us about the approaching end of our lives and the OT prophet Zephaniah and Gospel writers both warn of the judgment that comes with the end times.

However, when the Apostle Paul addresses these issues, how everything will happen in the end time, he does so in

order to bring encouragement and comfort to his congregations, especially to the Thessalonians. (Amy L.B. Peeler; Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Working Preacher November 19, 2017)

Today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading is part of a slightly larger passage in his first letter to them that begins and ends with encouragement to comfort one another with his words about the end time. He's teachings are meant to be an encouragement and comfort for believers in Jesus, who are already doing the right thing. They are eagerly waiting for Jesus' return and in the meantime, they are living lives that reflect their faith. (*Understand he is not saying they are perfect or without sin, just that because they are oriented toward Jesus and that is demonstrated in their lives, they need not fear.*)

So if Jesus' return comes like a "thief in the night," they don't need to worry because they are "children of the light". They will know Jesus when they see him. (Amy L.B. Peeler)

Now what we will never know is whether the Thessalonians were as faithful as Paul described or if he was using my mother's trick of saying I was what she wanted me to be, so that I would live up to that description.

You've probably done it too. We tell our children they are hard workers and responsible because we want them to live up to that.

Or we tell our friends that they are always there for us  
Or a spouse that she is the best cook in the world.

Whatever way you look at it though Paul's message is "**be who you already are.**" In this way he encouraged the Thessalonians and us to remain faithful Christians and the effect can have a powerful impact on our lives.

So, this week, I am encouraging you to be encouraging of others. Before you leave church today, come up with at least 3 names of people you want to extend a word of encouragement. It might be someone close to you like family or a friend or maybe someone you know only by sight, like your postman.

To help you become an encourager, I want to quickly share 5 steps suggested by blogger Lisa Bartelt.

**Assume everyone needs encouragement.** ... Turns out, even people who seem like they're confident and living out God's calling need encouragement too! Everyone needs encouragement in some way or another. If you know even one person, you know someone who needs encouragement.

**Notice people.** I know, it sounds a little creepy, but it can be enlightening. People will tell you a lot without ever saying a word. Chances are if you start looking around, you'll find someone who needs encouragement. ... Start looking.

**Do one easy thing now.** Texts and Facebook messages are easy for me. I can send off an encouragement text or Facebook post in a matter of seconds. Sometimes, that's all the time I have. ...

**Do one hard thing later.** Writing letters and notes to people is harder because it takes more time and costs a stamp and a trip to a mailbox. Talking to people in person is even harder. Maybe you can write a note once a week to someone just because (we all love mail, right?). Or maybe you can break out of your tendency to not bother anyone and tell someone at cleaning up at Culvers that you appreciate her work.

**Equip yourself.** We're much more likely to encourage if I feel prepared. Having some nice stationary might inspire you, but you don't have to be equipped with *stuff*. Equip yourself with *words*. Practice saying "Thank you" or "I appreciate you" or "Gosh, this job might seem lame, but you are doing good work!" Listen to other people encourage each other and learn from them. It's not hard, but it does take work sometimes.

Repeat the steps as necessary. I'm rediscovering that the more I encourage the more I want to encourage. And each little step in the direction of encouragement makes my burdens feel a little lighter.

--Excerpted from "5 on Friday: Steps to Become an Encourager," *Living Echoes*, a blog by blogger Lisa Bartelt, [lmbartelt.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/5-on-friday-steps-to-become-an-encourager](http://lmbartelt.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/5-on-friday-steps-to-become-an-encourager), May 23, 2014.

Of course, what I want you to understand is that to encourage is to be an instrument of God's grace. It works out of compassion and love and care for the other person, not judgment and condemnation and accusation. And it can make all the difference in someone's faith and life.

Now I want to say a few words of encouragement to you, my traveling companions for over 21 years. You are really an amazing congregation and your future is open to all sorts of wonderful possibilities. My staff have told me that more and more people are wondering, about what it is going to be like when I leave. There is excitement, as there should be. There will be new energy and new vision.

However, there will also be change and change can take effort and can be worrisome until it becomes more familiar. But I want to assure you that you are a healthy, faithful congregation with members who continue to grow in faith, trust Jesus' promise to be with us in all things.

I know you will continue to care about the hopes and hurts of those in need and increase in compassion for God's world.

You already know that you are loved and saved by grace. So, as we move through this transition together and then separately I want to encourage you to be who you already are, confident that God will continue to bless you.

You only need to be who you already are and God will bless you.

This is the good news of the gospel.