4:1 Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. 2For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, 5not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. 8Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.—1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Message Rev. Jin Hur

As we know, each day, week, month, and year brings shifts in the world, our circumstances, and especially contemporary culture. Yet God's love and our Lord Jesus' grace remain steadfast. This is why we gather this morning to worship God and praise the Lord. What is your prayer, request, or gratitude today? What is God's will for us today?

4:1 "Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more."

Apostle Paul and his mission team's identity is clear. He stated, *"We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus."* I believe he aimed to urge, appeal to, and encourage people to trust in Jesus. Throughout several chapters of 1 Thessalonians, he repeated the terms urging, appealing, and encouraging. Given the current climate of global uncertainty and conflict, it may be appropriate for the Church to implement such supporting and stimulating measures.

Paul also said, *"We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus."* The phrase "in the Lord Jesus" indicates that Paul and his team believed they identified themselves as one body with the Thessalonica church in Christ. They appealed to the church in the Lord Jesus rather than through a purely personal relationship, because they held firmly to the conviction of a single identity in Christ; the siblings, families, and one body of faith in the Lord. This wording expressed a distinct spiritual connection and a shared belief in the same identity in Jesus.

Do we at Centennial UMC share a unified identity in Jesus across our own members, the Roseville campus, and the St. Anthony Park campus? Do we hold a firm conviction of a single identity in Jesus between ourselves and the MN Annual Conference as the broader church? Yes, we, Centennial UMC, walk together in God's mission and share resources, including one administrative board to support each campus's mission and ministries, one staff team, and shared mission areas such as compassion and justice, the flames, children and youth ministries, and varied activities and mission projects for our neighbors. We are one body in Christ. Yes, we support each other with the MN Annual Conference as our larger church. Centennial is one of three hundred local congregations in the Annual Conference. Bishop and appointed cabinet plan and discern how to encourage and support each local church, including appointment of pastors in the grace and love of God, in the name of Jesus, our Lord. We are one body in Christ.

Naturally, the UMC maintains partnerships with other denominations, and we share credentials for Holy Communion with certain mainline churches because we believe that

we are one body in Christ. With this conviction, we continue learning how to live and how to please God rather than please people or satisfy ourselves. As a faithful congregation, we, Centennial UMC, should pursue this more consistently.

"There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus"—Galatians 3:28, Christian Standard Bible

When Paul spoke of *"in the Lord Jesus,"* he highlighted that believers form one body in Christ, encouraging us to move together in following God's will. As one body in Christ, Paul encourages us today to love one another and to please God through belonging, through shared life, and through the Lord Jesus, our Messiah. Thus, it is evident that God's purpose calls us to a journey of holiness together in Christ, to share our resources in Christ, and to serve the church and the world in Christ.

Paul also articulates God's will as our sanctification across three distinct dimensions. He proclaimed clearly,

"For this is the will of God, our sanctification:

1) *We should abstain from sexual immorality,*
2) *Each one of us should know how to control our own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion,*
3) *None of us should wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.*

Sanctification should involve not only spiritual practice but also practical actions in our daily lives. In Paul's context, he highlighted sanctification within everyday life, urging sexual morality and bodily control while avoiding harmful attitudes toward others in this matter. Within the Wesleyan tradition, believers are expected to express faith through practical actions. We believe we have received the grace of Jesus without cost, a spiritual gift offered freely. This truth and our faith guide how we live and act as followers of Jesus. Because we have received it without payment, sharing it with others comes naturally. This is amazing grace—a flow of love from our hearts to the world.

Works of piety keep us close to the heart of God:

- *Prayer, scripture, and fasting in our private lives*
- *Holy Communion, worship, and honest accountability with one another in community*

Works of mercy carry that love into the world:

- *Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, and welcoming the stranger, one person at a time*
- *Seeking justice and dismantling what keeps God s children oppressed, together*

—From "A Message from Bishop Lanette Plambeck"

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, taught that God meets us through the means of grace. He recommended two kinds of practical actions as the means of grace.

First, it is called Works of Piety, such as prayer, reading Scripture, and spiritual discipline, for instance, fasting or self-control, attending Holy Communion, worship, and honest accountability in daily life. These practices of Works of Piety keep us close to the heart of God. The other side of the means of grace involves Works of Mercy. As Methodists, we should keep practicing actions like feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and welcoming guests and visitors, while seeking justice and dismantling forms of evil such as hate, discrimination, racism, sexism, and all kinds of violence and war in this broken world. These acts should express our love for the world in Christ.

Our Bishop, Lanette Plambeck, wrote, *"Mercy is not the reward for piety, and piety is not a rest from mercy. Wesley counted works of mercy as means of grace in their own right. We meet Christ at the communion table, and we meet him again in the face of the least of these" (Matthew 25:40). This is why he could say there is no holiness but social holiness." A faith formed alone and kept to ourselves is not yet the faith of Jesus."*

Let us remember our identity, our mission, and God's will. As Centennial families of faith, as Methodists, and as followers of Jesus, we should keep practicing the means of grace through our actions in holiness—the ongoing process of sanctification—because we believe God intends to give us the Holy Spirit every day and every moment. Today's passage concludes in verses 7-8, *"For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore, whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

Holiness does not require daily worship, three hours of prayer, or reading scripture each day; instead, it involves accepting God's invitation and joining small parts of the Church's mission and ministry teams. You might visit the office once a week or every other week to ask how you can help. Alternatively, you could join any Ministry Team to care for others and serve local communities once a month. Or you could sign up volunteers for worship liturgist, Advent Candlelighter, or choir members, or bell choir members, or hospitality team, etc.

Practicing holiness is close at hand, and I hope it does not burden you with real high expectations. You might want to try it out with something small first. As a closing sermon, I encourage you to practice holiness in our daily lives by the power of the Holy Spirit and to consider our Bishop's recommendations.

"Praxis invites us to keep Christ at the center of our lives. A Christ-centered faith is never a stationary faith, because Christ is always on the move toward someone. His expectation, and his invitation, is that we move where he moves. Calling us to not merely think about faithful living – but to move boldly into faithful living... Praxis does not ask us to do everything. It asks us to do the next faithful thing... Come to the table. Worship, pass the peace, receive communion, and stay for coffee with people… The table is where we practice the world God intends." — An Episcopal Message from Bishop Lanette Plambeck

May it be so. Thanks be to God! Amen.