

***Sharing Our Lives***  
***I Thessalonians 2: 1-12***

**First Presbyterian Church  
2021  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana  
Dawson**

**September 26,**

**Gerrit Scott**

Besides our Lord himself, no person has demonstrated the sheer intellectual power and creativity to match Paul. He reset the entire Hebrew Scriptures in the key of Jesus. He recast the best of Greek culture in light of the gospel. He composed his letters on his feet, dictating them to a scribe, often while in a prison and recovering from wounds. He communicates succinctly, clearly and yet with a depth that can be studied for a lifetime. The mind of Paul is unsurpassed ever since. The sheer power of his thought enabled him to persist even as people lashed out because his ideas were reworking all they had ever thought about the way God and the world work. They recoiled against him because the truth of Jesus that Paul explained demanded a total, radical reorientation of life and behavior. It cost everything, a price Paul showed again and again he was willing to pay.

Paul was not just a brainiac for Jesus. He was absolutely gobsmacked with his Savior. Totally in love with Christ. His passion was to see others come to know the saving, redeeming, and enlivening love of Jesus in their deepest souls. And he was actually quite tenderhearted towards the believers who received his gospel. He worried over them, prayed for them, and visited them whenever he could. Paul's heart overflowed with affection toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. This is all the more remarkable when you realize that just a few years before he would have disdained any contact with Gentiles, spurning them in their uncleanness. Now he counts Gentile Christians as precious and dear to his soul.

Nowhere do we see Paul's affection overflow as in I Thessalonians. Today's chapter is a window on the heart of the great apostle. Even more, today's passage is a window into how church leadership is supposed to work. Let's look at three phrases:

**1) Entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak.** Paul notes how his team had

been treated in Philippi. He and Silas had been arrested and accused of disturbing the peace and the economy by their strange teaching. The magistrates had them stripped, beaten with rods, then placed, without treatment for their wounds, into the inner prison with their feet fastened into the stocks (See Acts 16: 16-24). In this condition, Paul and Silas sang hymns to God, so that the other prisoners marveled at such faith. False accusation, beatings and indefinite imprisonment seemed no barrier to experiencing the joy of Jesus.

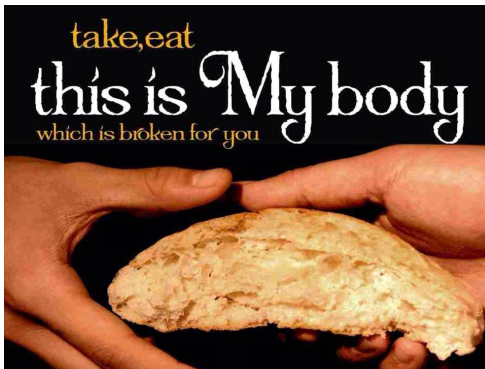


About midnight, God sent a great earthquake, which shook the prison to its foundation. The doors flew open and their bonds released. But Paul and Silas did not immediately flee the jail. They waited to meet the jailer. He was terrified at what would happen to him if his prisoners escaped. Paul shared with him the gospel, and the jailer became a believer. That night the very essence of the church of Jesus Christ was revealed. *Two washings occurred.* In love and gratitude for his newfound salvation, the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas. And Paul washed the jailer and his whole family by baptizing them, symbolically joining them to Jesus and his cleansing of our sins. So a picture of the church of Jesus came into focus: we are a wound-washing community. We wash minds and bodies broken in so many tragic ways. In the power of the Spirit, we wash dirty souls with the gospel news of Christ's forgiveness and grace.

When Paul, Timothy and Silas came to Thessalonica, their wounds were still healing. Limping and lacerated, they shared the gospel. Even knowing they would meet opposition, they declared the news about Jesus. So Paul writes, "entrusted with the gospel, so we speak...For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor as a pretext for greed." In other words, we share the gospel because it is the truth and we want others to

know it. We share the gospel because Jesus saves us and changes us and sends us to invite others to participate. There is much joy when others come to believe and know Christ. Wound-washing love occurs. Life change follows. So does conflict. The gospel is not safe. It is dynamite grace, and therefore creates strong reactions. That's to be expected, but not avoided.

**2) To share our own selves.** We might think that anyone who could write as forcefully as Paul would blow into town and just overwhelm people. But that was not his way. He writes, "We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear [literally, beloved] to us." Paul and Timothy gave their lives along with their words to the Thessalonians. Their ministry was life on life.



Several times a year, I bring you some new insights from one of my spiritual heroes Raniero Cantalamessa. Recently I was reading the talks that Father Raniero gave to the Catholic bishops of the United States. In one presentation, he talked about the importance of Communion, the Eucharist, in our day to day ministry. Jesus says every time we break the bread, "This is my body, given for you." He says every time we share the cup, "This is my blood, poured out for you." We love Communion because we receive Jesus freshly each time we partake.

But here's the twist Raniero put into the talk. When we leave worship, we go into the world prepared to say the same words to each person we meet. Internally, when I have an appointment, I am to say, "This is my body, given for you." I offer my time, my attention, listening ears, an open heart, and any such wisdom as the Lord grants. Each time we serve our families, we can say, "This is my lifeblood, poured out for you." I'm going

to work, giving my effort, sweat and blood to make a home for us. Or, “I’m really feeling too tired to watch your soccer game, but I’m going anyway, because my life is offered to you.” Our whole day can be spent *eucharistically*. That means we are offering ourselves to others in gratitude for the everlasting life Christ has given to us. We offer ourselves to be eaten. Some of the people we meet have sharp teeth and they grind us pretty hard. That’s why we need the refreshment of weekly worship and daily prayer and good fellowship. But strengthened by Christ, each day we offer our lives to others.

There was no detachment between Paul the teacher and Paul the man. He lived among the Thessalonians, working out his faith and faithfulness before their eyes. What a great model for church ministry this is. That’s what I love about being a local church pastor. We live where you live. We experience the same city you experience. We do life together. Year by year, over the long haul. You know whether I’m faking it or not. You know if I am truly questing for Christ and sharing him with you. I love too that Presbyterians elect their elders. Your leaders live out their faith and lives right here in our midst. We’re running our race together. Raising our kids together. Facing illnesses and uncertain times together. How tender are Paul’s words, “We shared with you our own selves, because you had become beloved to us.” I think you know that’s the way I feel about you. I think you know that’s how your pastors and staff and elders feel about you. There’s a lot of love in this room!

**3) Walk in a manner worthy.** Lastly, let’s note these words of Paul, “Like a father, we exhorted each one of you, and we encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” God has called each of us into a life which reflects his kingdom values, his love and his grace. I’d like to talk about this in a specific way.



I'm passionate about our *Building Up* Campaign. I believe that we're called to come alongside these four key ministry partners in a significant way. Your elders believe the same thing. I totally agree with David Kozan who talks about how these projects help us define who we are. With him, I want people to be able to say clearly what our church is about. Who is First Presbyterian Church? We're the church that provides a home for sex-trafficked women so they can have a new life. We're the church that builds a high school for orphans in Uganda. We're the church that builds a school where under-privileged children in Baton Rouge can have a first class Christian education. We're the folks bringing the gospel to New Orleans." Doesn't that jazz you? Don't you want to be able to say that to your friends and neighbors? This is what we're doing.

But now I have to take a little time to talk straight with you. This is a big ask. We can't neglect the regular, annual giving to our church. We're not contracting, we're expanding and we need every one to keep on with regular giving to Christ's work here. The *Building Up* Campaign is over and above what you already give. And it will take every one of us to get there. There's not a magic pot of money in someone else's pocket that's going to take care of this. It's just us. Is God calling you, in these crazy times, to give significantly to his mission through *Building Up*?

I want you to talk about this with each other. Go ahead and say the outrageous thing you're being asked to do. Chatter! "Our church leaders are asking us to contribute to a campaign that is over and above our regular budget. And they wants us to raise an amount that is half a year's budget for us. \$1.5 million on top of the budget!" Talk to each other about that. Talk to your neighbors. Give each other the whole scoop. Not a dime of it is for our church. It's all for mission bricks and mortar ministry projects. Talk with your family. Talk with God. Are we supposed to be part of this? At what level?

And I want you to know that Rhonda and I are all in. We've made our pledge. We've committed to giving to *Building Up* what one year's church pledge is. So we're going to continue and increase our annual pledge, then over the next two years give that same amount over again to *Building Up*. If you want to know specifically how much that is, come tonight to our meeting and I'll tell you.

I believe we will rise to this challenge. But I have to say again. It takes all of us. Especially it takes some early adopters. We need folks who decide now, "I'm in." And then will talk to their fellow church members. Will you tell someone that you believe in this outrageous project? Will you talk about the four ministry partners and what they're about? This week, you'll get a beautiful brochure in the mail. Will you share it with someone? It's only going to work if we in this room and watching online say, "OK, I believe this is part of working worthily of the calling to which we have been called. We're in, and we'll talk about it with others." Will you let your keychain from Esther's House remind you to pray for these ministries and our campaign? Decide now so that you can be part of creating momentum.

The apostle Paul was all in with Christ. And that made him all in with his fellow believers. He experienced first hand how the church is a wound-washing community. We tend to the hurts of others, both physical and spiritual. He knew that life in Christ was life side by side. He gave words like no other person ever has. He also gave his heart, his time, and his involvement. This led Paul to depths of love he never knew in his old life. The old Paul who lived a rigid legalism and breathed rage against Christ never knew such love. But now, as he gave his life to others he experienced the joy of being affectionately connected to other believers. Those he once would have ignored or despised became beloved to him. For that's what grace does. And that's what mission does. It opens our hearts. It deepens our relationships. It inspires us to give ourselves away eucharistically praying as we encounter others, "This is my body, given for you as Christ gave himself to me." This is how we walk in a manner worthy of such a calling.