

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Epistle of Saint Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica, chapter three verses one through thirteen.

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Have you ever been in a race? Maybe you were tied to someone else's leg in a three-legged race and had to hobble along. Maybe you were running ahead of everyone else. Maybe you were taking your time and going slowly. In our text for today, Saint Paul remarks that Jesus, the Word of the Lord, was speeding ahead, going faster and farther than anyone could ask or imagine. The Word of the Lord was proven true in the conception and birth of the Messiah by a virgin. It raced far ahead of expectation when Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and rose again according to Scripture. The Word of the Lord prevailed mightily when, in a single day, thousands were converted at the preaching of Peter. The Word of the Lord accomplished all these things and so many more that time would fail to tell, we could be here for many hours!

In our races, when we stumble and fall, what do you do? Are you surprised? Don't be. Suffering and trial are our lot as this old world is wearing out and as Satan thrashes around and lashes out, seeking his prey like a hungry lion. Are you wearied? Don't be. Nothing has overtaken you that is not common to man. Your battles are not new, and they are not your own. You labor with Christ and with all his people. What should you do? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

I. We have confidence because of the Lord's faith-fulness.

Paul tells the congregation he planted in Thessalonica to pray that the Word of the Lord would speed ahead just as it did to them, making haste, making a way for faith (v 1). Paul commands that they pray because he knows that the Lord is faithful (v 3a). The Lord's desire and design for his children is to guard and keep them from the evil one (v 3b), just as you pray in the Lord's Prayer that you may be delivered from evil, or, more literally, from the evil one. When Paul was wearied or perplexed or downtrodden or near death, he still had a loving Father and a Savior whose atoning blood was shed for him. So do you.

You can have confidence in the Lord's faithfulness because His promises are sure (v 4). Which of his promises has failed? The promise that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head? The promise that in the Seed of Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed? The promise that death would not find anyone inside the homes on which the lambs' blood was smeared on the doorposts? The promise that the Virgin would conceive and bear a Son? The promise that the Holy One of God would not see corruption? Which of his divine and everlasting promises has failed? Not a single one! All the promises of God

find in our Lord Jesus their fulfillment, their Yes, and their Amen to God's eternal glory!

His record is solid, and his faithfulness is sure. Not a single day in your life has been lived apart from his care and love. You may not have always known or not always appreciated or not always cared about that care and that love. He did not take it from you. He never left you, nor did he forsake you. See God's love so richly and eternally displayed in the cross of Jesus, where you see for yourself how strongly his fatherly love for you sought you. If God were anything other than a loving Father, he would not have sent his Son, Jesus, to the cross for you, laying on the God-man's shoulders your sin, your complaining, your guilt, your shame, your fear, your cowardice, your indifference, your shallowness and pettiness. God did not count those trespasses against you but made peace by the blood of Jesus' cross.

Peace with a loving God will point your hearts to the steadfastness of Christ. The world swirls and changes constantly. It did in Paul's day. It does in ours. Just look at all the upheaval from Tuesday's election results. You don't have to be confident in yourself that "it will all work out." You don't have to be confident that everything you ever wanted will someday fall into your lap. No such life is promised in the Bible, so you don't need to worry about the fact that it does not happen. What is promised and seen in the Bible is that Jesus Christ is steadfast. Everything changes; everything comes and goes; the surest things and the surest friends are here today and gone tomorrow. Life fades like a dream, and all flesh is like grass, growing, fading, dying. But the Word of the Lord endures forever. The world will turn and change, but Christ is the same today, yesterday, and forever.

So you won't have a bad day or a bad week or a bad month or a bad year in which God is not your loving Father and Christ is not your steadfast Savior. You won't face a little difficulty or a big bill or a temporary inconvenience or an accident that changes life forever without a Father who sees and knows your every need and a Brother who was himself perfected through suffering. You will not see a single sunrise without knowing the Father who set the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens and the Savior who is fairer and brighter than the sun. Trust in the Lord!

II. We have quietness because our lives are the Lord's gift entirely.

This is what Paul did. He trusted in the Lord for his good purposes, and the apostle was confident that the Thessalonians would lead lives fitting for believers in action not merely in words.

The situation in Thessalonica was that some people, believing the resurrection had already occurred, were living as if nothing mattered, and among other things, had stopped working. They did nothing all day, just blabbed and chattered and upset their fellow believers, yapping and running at the mouth (v 11). Sticks and stones can break your bones, and sometimes words *do* hurt you or others. Saying anything that comes into your head, having "no filter,"

offering your opinion on every subject, and especially proclaiming false doctrine—in this case, that the resurrection had already happened, strange as that falsehood may seem—are evils far more grievous far more often than a neighborhood kid’s baseball breaking a window.

Jesus said about people’s lives, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Mt 7:16). Don’t just listen to what people say—important as words are—but observe also what they do. The blabbers and chatterers do nothing. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he was working with his own hands so he would not burden the Thessalonians (vv 7–8), for the spread of the Gospel. The life Paul led showed that he thought the Gospel and the faith of the Thessalonians in the Savior were more important than anything else. He was willing to set everything else aside so that they could hear and believe the Gospel that Jesus was their steadfast Savior. The blabbers and chatterers are willing to set everything else aside (including productive work!) so that others can pay attention to them and heed their words and stir up trouble and strife. They talk and talk and talk and do nothing because they love to be heard and to take bread from someone else’s mouth without lifting a finger.

That’s why Paul sums up his teaching with this: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (v 10). Sound too harsh? too formulaic? The idea is that freeloading comes along with consequences. Talking and not working is not a “victimless crime.” Nothing is free. Everything has its cost. The only question is *who* will be paying. Who will provide lunch? Who will provide meals when a baby is born or someone goes into the hospital? Who will provide a helping hand when the lady down the street is too old to care for her house like she used to? All these things, all this love and care, everything good about being together in our families, our neighborhoods, and our churches, cost someone something.

Jesus knew that. His forgiveness and mercy cost him his life. He knew that was the cost, and he paid it nonetheless. Paul knew that Jesus had paid his whole debt of sin, and he imitated Christ in giving up his rights and prerogatives for the sake of the Gospel, working with his own hands so that the new Christians would not have to go without the Gospel because they couldn’t pay a preacher of the Gospel. Everything costs someone something, and the Christian who is imitating Paul, who was imitating Christ, knows that.

You know that providing lunch after church or meals when someone’s in need or a helping hand around the house or love for a lifetime all have costs, and because you are in Christ, you are happy to bear those costs. You don’t need to talk about them, telling everyone all the good you’re doing. You don’t need to shout from the rooftops the lasagna you made for Ly when she had her baby girl or the lights you replaced in church. You don’t need to talk and chatter and blab on. You need to know what costs have to be borne and what burdens have to be shared, and you pray that you may bear them and share them, just as Christ bore and shared yours, just as Paul bore and

shared the Thessalonians'. We who are in Christ are always bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ, who bore all our sin.

We live the life of Christ, bearing burdens in *quiet* confidence. Quietness is the opposite of blabbing and gossiping, but quietness is not the same thing as silence. Silence never speaks; quietness may sometimes speak. It may speak to encourage, to forgive, to guide, to sing, to pray. Quietness does not have to be heard at all times, at the beginning and end of every meeting. Quietness is happy to listen, quick to hear, slow to speak, and thus slow to anger. Quietness can carry a tongue in its head without always using its tongue. Quietness will not set the whole world on fire and does not need to. It is confident that the Lord will act and that the Lord will fulfill his Word.

Quietness was Christ's, and so it's yours too. He was quiet when Satan taunted him in the wilderness, using only God's Word to fight. He was quiet in the face of his many accusers, and when they made a mockery of him as he was shedding his life's blood for the life of the world, he prayed for his mockers' forgiveness. Quietness is confident; loudness, brashness, yapping, blabbing, gossiping, chattering cannot be confident. They are nervous and anxious and worried about how they sound and how they look. Christ, in his quietness, looked only to God for vindication and life, and his confidence was not put to shame. In quietness, he was raised on the third day.

Lead the quiet life you've been given, however much noise the world puts into it. Share in the burdens of the saints, love your family, your neighborhood, and your church—love your neighbor. You do not need the world's vindication or applause. You have a Father who sees in secret and a Savior in whose scarred hands your whole life is now hidden from sight. When he appears at long last with his angels and all the elect of God, you will receive the life and glories he has laid up for you, the treasures that nothing can touch. He is steadfast, he is faithful, and he will surely do it.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen!