

## “Responding to the Call”

I Thessalonians 2: 1-12

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

**God holds the future.** The Thessalonian church was anticipating that Christ was coming back soon. Paul was persecuted but did not lack enthusiasm and hope for the future. He was encouraging to the Thessalonian church because of the certain hope he had in Christ for the future and in that present moment. The hope he shared in Christ gave him joy as he was responding to the call from Christ to share the Good News of the Gospel.

**‘Gospel’ means the good news of God’s grace.** The Good News of Christ’s unconditional love and forgiveness is not only knowledge we have been given along with all the other information we are exposed to in our lives, the Good News of the Gospel makes a difference in how we live our day to day lives. The Good News goes to the core of our identity as belonging not to ourselves, but to God – in life and in death.

**Preaching the Good News with gentleness.** Paul made it clear that his work for Christ’s Kingdom is not out of greed, the need for human recognition or other impure motives. Rather he comes in gentleness as a nursemaid and as a loving parent gives to their children so that the nature of the Good News can be received by them for what it is – Good News of great Joy! The majority of parents want their children to eat vegetables for a good healthy body. They want their children to develop the habit of eating nutritious food so their bodies will be strong in the future as they grow. Since parents want the best for their children why wouldn’t they want to nurture and feed their children’s soul with abiding love - with the knowledge of Jesus who knows them and loves them now and for eternity? Not always, but too often the answer to that question is that they do not see the joy of Christ’s love in Christians.

**Encouraging others not to miss the call.** In spite of our circumstances, we are all called to share the Good News of the Gospel. The call from Christ, means that you regularly allow yourself to be uncomfortable in reaching out to others with your words and actions. In following the way of Christ who suffered for the benefit of others, Paul was willing to do the same. Busyness, entertainment, engaging in consumerism and other idols can distract us from missing the call from God. The Christian life is lived with the knowledge of our victory in Christ and the sure and certain hope of Christ’s return when he will make all things new.

**Planting for the future.** Theologian and Civil rights leader Howard Thurman told the story of when he was a young boy. One morning he was walking down a country road and saw a farmer working in the field. As he came closer to the farmer, he noticed the

man was elderly. The man was planting little seedlings a distance apart in the field. Thurman was curious and walked over to the fence. He said, "Sir, what are you planting? The old man looked up from the corner of his eye and said, "Pecan trees" and continued to dig.

Thurman wondered at this because he knew that pecan trees were slow growing. It often takes 10 years or more before they bear any fruit at all and this old man was clearly 75 or 80 years old.

"But why do you plant them?" young Thurman asked. "For sure you know it will take many years before they produce any pecans. You most likely will never live to gather a single nut from these trees. So why do you plant them?"

The old man straightened up his back with some pain and looked at Thurman in the eye and said that his whole life he had eaten nuts and fruits that others had planted before him. "Now it is my turn", he said. The old farmer continued, "The man who decides to plant only for his own harvest has no faith in the future." Thurman then realized that this farmer was more than one who plants crops; he was a nurturer of the generations to come. He lived by the knowledge of God's gifts in his life and, with gratitude, wanted to pass on what he received to others.

God is calling you to respond to His call with confidence of Christ's presence today in your life and certain hope for his return. With joy, allow yourself to be uncomfortable in planting and nurturing the seeds of faith in those around you and for the generations to come. Amen.