

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from Nov 15, 2020



Welcome Good Morning and welcome to our worship service at Harland United Methodist Church. Paul's mission team came to the city of Thessalonica and taught the people the basics of the faith, how Jesus the Son of God came and walked among us as teacher and example of living life as it is meant to be lived, died for our sins and was raised to life again and that he would come again and we would meet him in the air. Today we talk about the joy of throwing our heart, mind, soul, and strength into our efforts because of those basic beliefs that Paul taught the Thessalonians, and that Charles and Mary Jo are going to sing about now...

Special Music

Oh Glorious Day

One day when Heaven was filled with His praises
One day when sin was as black as could be
Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin
Dwelt among men, my example is He
Word became flesh and the light shined among us
His glory revealed

Refrain

Living, He loved me Dying, He saved me
Buried, He carried my sins far away
Rising, He justified freely forever
One day He's coming
Oh glorious day, oh glorious day

One day they led Him up Calvary's mountain
One day they nailed Him to die on a tree
Suffering anguish, despised and rejected
Bearing our sins, my Redeemer is He
Hands that healed nations, stretched out on a tree
And took the nails for me

Refrain

One day the grave could conceal Him no longer
One day the stone rolled away from the door
Then He arose, over death He had conquered
Now is ascended, my Lord evermore

Death could not hold Him,
 the grave could not keep Him
 From rising again
Refrain

One day the trumpet will sound for His coming
 One day the skies with His glories will shine
 Wonderful day, my Beloved One bringing
 My Savior Jesus is mine

Refrain
 Glorious day, Oh glorious day

Theme

Thanksgiving is coming up in a week and a half. I once asked of children this following question: Are you thankful for things you need to work hard for you to do? Most of them answered honestly, "No". And if we were honest, we'd probably say the same thing. The Bible says in Colossian 1:29 (repeat with me):

I am working with all his energy which is powerfully at work within me.

We had motions that went with it too: ***I am working*** {with elbows at side, bend 90 degrees so fist hands are in front of you, and vibrate them like an isometric exercise} ***with all his energy*** {open both hands and raise them upwards and vibrate them like they are electrified} ***which is powerfully at work*** {lift elbows parallel to shoulders, forearms straight up, re-fist the hands (like a strong person pose) and wave them slightly back and forth like they are "working"} ***within me.*** {flatten your hands and tap your chest several times} (Adapted from Col 1:29 NTE))

Other verses in the Bible say we should do everything with all our heart as if we were doing it for God himself, because we are.

Beyond that very good reason, I asked these children: can you think of other reasons we should thankfully work really hard at things that are hard for us to do? I figured that would pretty much stump them – it stumps a lot of adults. I made a list for the children... Granted, knowing an answer and owning and answer (incorporating that answer into our life) are two wholly different things. Nevertheless, here is the list...

- * The more we work at it, the better we get at it.
- * The better we get at it, the easier it becomes.
- * The easier it becomes, the more fun it is (or if it isn't, at least we can get it done well and more quickly and it will be over with)

- * The better we do and more fun we have with it, the more we and others can appreciate the results. (And we will receive less complaints about doing a poor job which is never fun).
- * Others will be proud of us for our efforts, and we can be proud of ourselves when we do our very best.
- * If we do our very best, God will do his very best in us as well. He can work through us better if we are working to do our very best. That is one reason Jesus says the most important rule God gives us for life is that we love him with all our hearts, and all of minds, and all of soul, and all of strength -- with all that we are (and each other as ourselves...)

And that is another reason we can be thankful this Thanksgiving -- that God loves us and wants to do his best for us, and we can gratefully do our best for him too...

So, one last time: {with motions as listed above} ***I am working with all his energy which is powerfully at work within me.*** If this were a Children's Time, I'd hand out energy bars and tell them, when you eat this energy bar) or in your case, have an energy drink, think of this verse and God and from where our real source of energy comes.

Of course, not everyone in our culture agrees with what we just learned, do they? They want us to prioritize a different way of living. Paul wrote about the need to ignore these distractors and concentrate on our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Call to Worship (Leader, Congregation)

Many choose other goals. They take other paths and try to drag us along with them. They replace God with their own appetites. They think only about earthly things. They hate Christ's Cross. They want an easy street. But that street is a dead-end.

For us, there is far more to life.

We are citizens of a new homeland in heaven.

We await the return of our Savior from there.

Be filled with joy in the Lord. Be proud of Christ.

We will worship God in his Spirit.

Don't attempt to serve without Christ working in and through you. At one time, personal accomplishments in the name of "religion" seemed important. But these achievements, and all other things for that matter, are insignificant compared with the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. Don't settle for anything less than a robust, right relationship with God that comes from trusting Christ through faith.

We want to embrace Christ as he has embraced us.

Not that we have already perfectly achieved what God wants us to be. We are not experts. We have a long way to go. We continue reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out and taken hold of us as his own. Forgetting what is past, press onward – to Jesus.

We will keep our focus on him. We won't turn back from God's high calling through Christ Jesus.

Those of us who are spiritually mature want everything God has for us will keep pursuing that goal.

We are on the right track. We will remain completely committed to running this course together.

(Inspired by Philippians 3 (ERV, MEV, MSG))

Intro to Song

Not only is knowing something and living something two different things, so is there a difference between doing our best and doing something perfectly, right?. There are two secular songs. One talks of aging, of battered, broken dreams and of unanswered questions, but what they did know was the truth of the love they shared. The other named a lot of school subjects, and that while he tried his best, hoping it might earn her love; he really didn't know all that much, but he knew he loved her, and if she loved him, it would be a wonderful world. Put that into our relationship with God, and we see that the Thessalonians who we have been talking about were living in Christ's strength in difficult times. Paul is clarifying some teachings. They weren't getting it all right, they weren't understanding everything about their faith, they did believe in God's love for them and responded with their faithful love for God and their love for each other, and because of that – they understood their ultimate destiny. (Don't Know Much by Barry Mann (1980) Linda Ronstadt and Aaron Neville (1989); Wonderful World by Sam Cooke (1960)).

Music *I Know Whom I Have Believed*

It is around this truth that we unite together. Therefore, let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing the prayer chorus *Bind Us Together*.

Song *Bind Us Together*

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord, bind us together in love.

There is only one God, there is only one king;

there is only one body, that is why we sing:

Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord, bind us together in love.

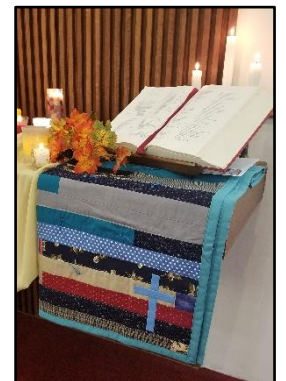
Prayer

Dear Lord, We are grateful that the test of being worthy of heaven is not found in a perfect performance, or a complete and total understanding of theology, or religion, or you – for you are beyond our grasp, and sometimes, it is difficult to know how to apply your eternal truths to our immediate context or circumstances. But you have made it clear what is important – that we believe in your Son, that we trust in your direction, and we freely follow you in willing love... Gracious God, you remind us that our hearts follow what we treasure. We confess that our spiritual journey is filled with too many distractions and side trips, not to mention sad events and difficult circumstances. As a result, we don't always sense you touching our hearts -- like no one else can. Settle our spirits, as we take deep breaths. [Pause at the *] Exhaling the busyness and pressures of the week *, inhaling the quiet peace of the moment *. Exhaling stress *, inhaling compassionate understanding*. Exhaling pain and struggle *, inhaling healing *. Settle our hearts into a holy silence. * We open ourselves to you in the quietness... (**SILENCE** – Long Pause) Lord, today, we celebrate that Carolyn Lynch's granddaughter Elsie has recovered from covid, but we remember the many more who are being impacted by this disease, directly or indirectly, and for Gary White who fell, is hospitalized and had surgery.



Quilt Prayer

We also pray for Harold Winegarner, who suffered a stroke, and for whom this quilt is being blessed. We pray your loving arms to imbue him with your strength and faith. As he wraps this quilt around him, calm his spirit and let your peace reign within him. Let the love and prayers of this church family bring comfort to his heart, and rest to his soul. We know you hold each one of us dear to you in your heart each moment of every day. Remind us that we are never alone. Bless this quilt so that as it is used, it will not only provide physical warmth, but he will experience warmth of heart, security of spirit, the covering of your love, the peace of your grace, and the joy of life in Christ.



We pray this prayer for Harold Winegarner, and the blessing of his quilt, in the name of the One who shares all of our joys and endures with us, right beside us, all of our sorrows. (Pause) Now witness to our spirits, that you may inspire us in our faith, and believe that that faith conquers all, moves mountains, and saves whoever calls on Jesus. As our hearts follow, you will transform us into a new way

of living, for you are a loving king who graciously gives us everything we need. We pray this in the precious name of Jesus, who taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading 2 Thessalonians 3:6b-13

The passage we will hear in the sermon is often taken out of its original context to reinforce attitudes that Paul did not necessarily intend. The Thessalonians struggled with putting it into practice because in a second letter to the church, he came back to nuances of the same topic. Hear what he writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:6b-13.

^{6b} People who refuse to work are not following the teaching that we gave them. ⁷ You yourselves know that you should live as we live. We were not lazy when we were with you. ⁸ And when we ate another person's food, we always paid for it. We worked and worked so that we would not be a trouble to any of you. We worked night and day. ⁹ We had the right to ask you to help us. But we worked to take care of ourselves so that we would be an example for you to follow. ¹⁰ When we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If anyone will not work, he will not eat." (ICB) ¹¹ You see, we hear that there are some among you who are stepping out of line, behaving in an unruly fashion, not being busy with real work, but just busybodies. (NTE) ¹² We command those people to work quietly and earn their own food. In the Lord Jesus Christ we beg them to do this. (ICB) ¹³ As for you, my dear family, don't get tired of doing what is right! (NTE)

Music Intro

"Never get tired of doing what is right." The hymnwriter expresses God's call for us to do just that.

Music *Here I Am, Lord*

Message *Respectful Teamwork* 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, 5:12-16

Good hearts, noble intentions, sincere efforts, dedicated lives in the service of others. And to borrow Paul's words from the last few weeks, we are motivated, inspired, committed, even commanded -- to do so more and more. Then mix in American culture that recognizes the damaging pressure of every "a-holism" except one -- workaholism. That one is worn proudly like a badge, its resulting exhaustion lifted like a trophy, and the ability to quote-unquote "handle" the stresses of our pursuits we call "character". The "how busy we are" mantra is inserted into or implied in almost every conversation. Society has equated being still / or being quiet as "a waste of time" and busy-ness -- as an end in itself -- is

equated with responsibility, meaning, purpose, and success.

A "successful" life has become a violent enterprise. People make war on their own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits. War on their families, because they don't make time for them. War on their communities, because they fearfully protect what they hoard, not feeling safe enough or content enough with what they have to be kind and generous. War on the earth, because in their quest for more, they become sloppy stewards of the world. War on their spirit, because they are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh them. War on their blessings because they can't stop to gratefully appreciate them – too busy pressing forward to the next level of success. For the people who fall victim to these pressures, work rarely feels light, pleasant, or healing. Instead, as it endlessly piles up on itself; (imagine the desk with the inbox where the papers just continue to stack higher and higher) the whole experience of being alive begins to melt into one enormous obligation, or obsession.

In the book, *Sabbath*, George Muller writes that: In the relentless busyness of modern life, we have lost the rhythm between work and rest. There is a rhythm in our waking activity and the body's need for sleep. There is a rhythm in the way day dissolves into night, and night into morning... the heart perceptibly rests after each life-giving beat; the lungs rest between the exhale and the inhale, if you went along with me during the prayer, you heard that and you felt that difference.

We have lost this essential rhythm as a society. Our culture teaches us that action and accomplishment and speed are better than all the rest, better than rest (you can take that both ways) and that doing something – that doing *anything* -- is better than doing "nothing"... to meet these ever-growing expectations, we do not rest. Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points [I remember an old insurance ad where Charlie Brown is running and he is lost in his thoughts and he runs right out of the stadium instead of turning and staying on the track the way he was supposed to -- too busy running to remember where we are supposed to be going]. too busy to notice the compass points that would show us where to go, that tell us *with what* we should be busy. We bypass the nourishment that would give us relief and strength. That'd be like the NASCAR drivers going past the pit stops until they have nothing left in their car, and they fall short of the finish line because they ran out of gas. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom. We miss the joy and love born of effortless delight. Poisoned by this hypnotic belief that good things come only through **unceasing** determination and **tireless** effort, we can never truly be still, and rest.

And much of today's text, if taken out of context, could make Paul sound like he is in complete agreement with this philosophy -- "never stop." And he didn't if you read his life, (or it sounds like that anyway). So, let's first find the context of what he is writing. Two things were likely happening in the city and church of Thessalonica.

1) Last week, we learned the Thessalonians were expecting Christ's return *any* moment. When time passed, they began to ask about the fate of their loved ones who had accepted Christ but have now died because too much time had passed for them. And now what is going to happen to them? We answered that question last week. Now Paul has also discovered that some of them, in anticipation of Christ's immediate return, had quit work to wait for him. If Christ were coming -- Friday, would you bother with "9 to 5", especially if it is one of those jobs that you -- don't like working 9 to 5? But Christ didn't come that quickly, and so now they were out of work and having to rely on the church's charity to survive, it was just going to be a few more days after all. We also learn from his second letter to them (which we heard in the Bible reading) that in needlessly quitting their work, they created all this spare time -- and with all that spare time they began to meddle in the lives of everybody else. Because if you are not busy, you are going to get busy with something.

2) The other issue that was going on in the church was that wealthy Greeks supported people who would advocate for their views in political and philosophical activism. I imagine it is kind of like the modern-day professional lobbyist who gets paid to represent somebody's point of view when it is not their own. If church people entered into this type of a work relationship, then they may get paid to represent views that conflicted with their Christian ethics and they'd be tempted to compromise them. Therefore, this is what Paul writes:

Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Mind your own business, and earn your own living, as we told you before. If you do these things, then those who are not believers will respect the way you live. And you will not have to depend on others for what you need. 1 Th 4:11-12 (ERV)

If you dig back into the original language, it is much more colorful than what we are reading in English. Paul tells them to make it your ambition to be unambitious; to seek restlessly to be still; to be content and at peace. With all your heart, refocus on God, make the time to allow God to restore your energy, and your soul, and your very life. And mind your business, meaning your own; not everybody else's. Don't be meddlesome. a busy body in your private laziness or in your public employment). So, as you are able -- get back to honest work (that won't put you in a moral bind); even if

society sees that work as “undignified and beneath them” (there is no such thing as unworthy honest work). Do this so that you will not have to be unfairly or unnecessarily dependent upon, or have to unfairly take advantage of the church’s love; and will win the respect of unbelievers. This text is not meant to be used as an excuse to neglect, look down on, or judge those who have had setbacks or challenges in life, and are struggling. It is for those who, as an incorrect expression of faith, have decided to do nothing else but wait for Christ and meddle in everyone else’s life. and for those who were in morally compromising jobs. About them, he writes,

We ask you, brothers and sisters, to warn those who will not work. Encourage those who are afraid. Help those who are weak. 1 Th 5:14 (ERV)

It was written to encourage us in the work of true love that mutually helps us all to become better people, not to judge other people. Paul says (1) to warn those who are refusing to work -- or the pious excuse of waiting for Christ to return. The phrase is a military phrase addressed to the soldier who refuses to keep in rank – you veterans understand what that means. We understand that. (2) And to encourage those who have become discouraged by circumstances -- a phrase that is self- explanatory, (3) and to help the weak – (literally “cleave” to the weak) – which means the Christian family needs to hold on to people and hold them in their needs, so that they know they are not alone. He goes on to say,

Mutual respect for spiritual partners

Now brothers and sisters, we ask you to recognize the value of those who work hard among you—those who, as followers of the Lord, care for you and tell you how to live. Show them the highest respect and love because of the work they do. (1 Th 5:12-13a) (ERV)

Paul goes on to say that we should highly esteem and love those (informal or official) spiritual leaders in our life – not for their status, not because of the position they hold, but because they conscientiously work hard for your benefit. These people cannot do their best work when they are subject to constant criticism (I actually wrote “carping criticism” -- but whatever kind of criticism it is that is beating them down. Can’t do that to each other as partners in ministry. Good leaders need good supporters, and vice versa. And this happens best, Paul says, when we

“Live in peace with each other... Be patient with everyone. Be sure that no one pays back wrong for wrong. But always try to do what is good for each other and for all people. Always be full of joy.” 1 Th 5:13b-16 (ERV)

Live in Peace (LiP)

Peace is never a one-way street. One side can do all in their power – but they can't control the other sides' response. (See Romans 12:18) It takes both sides to accomplish peace.

Paul says peace can more easily be accomplished if both sides -- are patient. The word means the opposite of short-fused. Patient with ourselves, with each other, and with everyone.

(LiP) by being patient

Preacher Phillips Brooks was known for his calm poise. One day a friend saw him pacing back in forth in his office like a caged lion and that friend asked him, "What's the trouble, Dr. Brooks?" He answered, "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry... but God is not." Sometimes we wish God would be less patient, but then when we look at our nation, we look at our communities, we look at our lives, I think we realize it is a good thing and are happy he is being patient with us. Yet it is easy to lose patience and understanding with people who seem to think or act differently than we do. But it is our own best interest if we are patient with ourselves and with



each other. As I've already implied, we are pressured to always be busy, and to be in a hurry about it. We can't do that.

Remember that the cogs in our life -- you know the gears with "teeth" on them that go all the way around, and then they inter-mesh with other cogs/ gears with "teeth". Well imagine that God is one great big strong gear and we are a small cog whose teeth are supposed to line up with God's to make our life go forward. Now if we try to get ahead of God, whose gear is it that you think is going to get stripped, and slip, and crash? It is not God's gears. We're the ones who lose traction, slip, slip, get worn out, cracked up – nervously, mentally, even physically and even spiritually, sometimes.

Peace can also be better accomplished if both sides refuse to retaliate. Multiple groups in

LiP by refusing retaliation

Thessalonica were lashing out at the church because of their faith. Some may have even been within the church. It must have been a strong temptation to lash back. Or out -- you know the old projection thing where the boss yells at the employee, the employee goes home and yells at the spouse, the spouse yells at the child, the child goes outside and kicks the dog, and it just keeps on a goin'.

Maybe you remember when the disciples asked Jesus if he should call down destruction on these strangers who would not welcome them. Jesus said, "No, that is not the kind of people we are to be." (See Lk 9:52-56). Christian teaching is not

meant to be applied only when circumstances are easy and fit in with our cultural patterns or sinful instincts. Instead we are to learn and lean on the power of the Christ, and it is to be lived out even under the most trying circumstances.

That is not just philosophical idealism, it is also in our own practical best interest. Sorry I'm going to get into sports again 😊, but here we go. In NASCAR, one driver thought a second driver had unfairly cut him off. He went out of his way to return the favor. They are doing this at 200 miles per hour! So you think this was a wise idea? And sure enough, it back-fired and he ended up wrecking himself out of the race, and if I remember correctly, he was suspended from the league for a little bit.

In football, I've noticed that the unsportsmanlike penalty is often given not to the instigator (who takes the first swing), but to the one who retaliates (strikes back) for the instigation. The referees often don't see the first hit, they see the returning hit, and that is who gets penalized more often than not. But even if we aren't "caught", it is still in our best interest not to retaliate because the retaliate attitude eats up the revenger more than it does the initial offender. They offend and then go off on their merry way, and we sit here stewing and it is eating us up, not them.

The old bumper sticker used to say, "I don't get mad, I get even." Remember that one? It may sound cute, may even sound like a clever loophole getting around the command to not take revenge. But there is never a "evening" in retribution. It is always an escalation, or at least it feels like it to whomever is getting the receiving end of it. And if both sides continue – ever bigger problems may ensue. It has got to stop somewhere, and that's why Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek" (Mt 5:39), and Paul said, "leave room for God's wrath, for it is written (in Dt 32:35) "It is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord" ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (See Rm 12:17-21)

Perhaps this is a good proverbial saying for us to remember: If someone lights the fuse on a stick of dynamite, it's probably better to cut the fuse off and be done with it rather than to be throwing it back and forth like a game of hot potato to see who it is going to blow up on, and chances are, it'll probably blow up on both of them.

Peace can also be better accomplished if both sides seek to be kind. It is the attitude of returning blessing for cursing, of being actively friendly in the face of hostility. Kindness has more to do with the nature of who we are – or God's Spirit within us, (See Gal 5:22, Cl 3:12) than it does the "niceness" of the situation. In other words,

LiP * by consistent kindness

will we be who we are, or will we let our situation (or others) determine what kind of people we are going to be and what kind of day we are going to have. Which would you rather have? Wouldn't you rather have the self-control and stamina, and the ability and "his strength working in us" to be the people we want to be rather than be pushed around by others, or circumstances.

And then peace is also helped by -- this is the tough one -- by constant joy. If we can only stop and find those

LiP * by constant joy

simple joys of life and let them make our day. Like all of these qualities I mentioned, most of us can identify at least one or two of them that are not easy for us to live out. Paul had learned that affliction and deep joy may go together. (2 Cr 6:10. 12:10) he rejoiced [even] in tribulations (Rm 5:3, Cl 1:24, Ac 5:41, 16:25) and he counsels perpetual rejoicing to a suffering church. From an outward point of view there was little to make them rejoice. But Christ said "No one will take away your joy (Jn 16:22) Joy is a characteristic of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) (Rom 14:17). It is not something Christians work up from their own resources, instead, we are "working with all his energy which is powerful at work within us". It is a gift that God gives to us... Phillips Brooks said the religion that makes a man [feel sad and frustrated and] "sick" is not going to cure the world.

So let's wrap up all these qualities and apply them by answering that old fun saying:

Do we bring happiness where we go or when we go?

Do we bring happiness where we go, or when we go? Which are we? As we work hard and encourage others to do the same; may it not be from guilt or from duty, or a worldly over-driven drive for the wrong kind of success, but rather with peace, and a patience, and a kindness, and a joy that makes us "Phew" really want to be a part of that energy.

Closing Prayer Let's pray. Lord, we sometimes have trouble living up to this calling of our faith, or at least, I do. We too easily let circumstances determine our peace and joy and use of time. We are tempted to compromise our faith in our work, in our volunteerism, and wherever we are. So, with the Psalmist we pray you would create in us pure hearts, renew steadfast spirits within us... restore to us the joy of our salvation. As we turn to you to light our way, fear dissipates. When we seek your joy, you become our strength. When we are tempted and evil advances against us, you faithfully hold us and keep us from falling. We seek your beauty and your power

today. We recognize that you are abundantly -- more -- than we will ever need for life. According to your patient timing, we ask you to intervene and bring your kingdom values on earth as they are in heaven, and we pray you grant us -- together -- to have the privilege of participating in that service of your kingdom in this world. in the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Closing Music *Together We Serve*

Closing Blessing Now as we leave, let us go with the assurance that God's grace and power always goes with us and guides us toward his light. As his children, then; hold high the light of Christ -- be a beacon of hope to those around you -- that all may be drawn to him. Amen.