

FCCS November 8, 2019
Rev. Curran Reichert

"The Value of Values"
2 Thessalonians 3:6-1

"Oh, why must you make me look at unpleasant things when there are so many delightful ones to see?' Mrs. Which's voice reverberated through the cave. 'There will no longer be so many pleasant things to look at if responsible people do not do something about the unpleasant ones.'" *Madeleine L'Engle, A Wrinkle in Time*

What do we value?

What values govern our lives and do we engage in regular assessments to ensure our lives are in keeping with our values?

Today's lectionary passage is about staying on track. It is about making sure the values we profess, as followers of Jesus, are actually being embodied in our dailiness.

What is clear from the Gospel accounts of Jesus is that he valued **compassion** and **equity** as foundational for maintaining right relationship with God and each other. We are exhorted by Paul this morning to maintain, among others, those values.

By in large I think we can pretty easily gage how compassionate we are in a given day. One of the most effective ways I know to do that is through a simplified version of the Ignatian exercises called the "Examen." At the end of each day you ask yourself, "Where was I open to giving and receiving **compassion** today and where did I close myself off from it?" Over time we see patterns that indicate where living this value comes easily to us and where we are in need of improvement.

The question of **equity** is pretty straightforward; are we daily doing our part to make the world and the communities in which we live fairer and more just for everyone? We look around and ask what needs to be done and how we might align ourselves with solutions? We know what to do, and there is always something we can do toward a more just world. If you need suggestions, check with Earth Care or Social Action teams, they have loads of ideas.

The value that seems more elusive yet undergirds every word Jesus and his disciples ever spoke is the admonition to be peacemakers. Based on his Jewish upbringing, Jesus believed that the only way to bring about God's reign on earth was through love. Paul the Apostle took up those teachings nearly forty years after Jesus' death.

In his first letter, Paul is instructing the Thessalonians, an early Christian Community in Greece under Roman occupation, on becoming self-sufficient so as not become embedded with and therefor dependent on the Roman Empire for survival.

Paul was certain that Jesus was coming again soon and would show them all the way forward- if the meantime they could keep their heads down and do good work, they might actually stay alive long enough to see the Messiah again.

In his second letter, Paul implores the Thessalonians to work toward a common purpose. This letter is not commentary on those who are for whatever reason unfit or unable to work. It is a reprimand for those who have the ability to accomplish much, but who in their idleness or privilege prefer to do nothing.

Now, anytime we see a letter like this in the ancient texts we have to assume it is a response to something that was actually creating problems. Wealth disparity was a painful reality for early Christian communities just as it is for us today. In Italy as in Greece those in power within the Roman Empire were getting richer and richer while the working class was getting poorer and poorer. Paul wanted his people to understand that **usefulness** is a core value. He needed to encourage the people of Thessalonica to be of good faith, and assure them that living out the value of love in service to others was its own reward.

Paul's teachings are derived from Jesus' sermon on the mount and in particular the instruction that says, blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Mathew 5:9). The heart of Paul message to his people is for them to be makers of peaceful community, resisting chaos and dissention at least amongst themselves.

Tomorrow our country will celebrate Veteran's day; originally called "Armistice Day" from the Latin word *arma* (arms) *sistere* (stand still), a day commemorating peace. On November 11, 1918, exactly 101 years ago, a truce was declared that ended WW1; "The Great War" or the war to end all wars. Armistice Day was born of that moment and dedicated to celebrating the end of all war.

At the close of World War II the holiday was renamed "Veterans Day," a day set aside to honor lives lost in military service since the second World War. What a travesty this endless construct of war, one has to wonder if we ever learn to live without it?

The veterans I have known, including my own family members, say that war is not an effective means to secure peace. I call to mind beloved members of this church Rudy Dorman and Ev Evkhanian,' who after their military service, devoted their lives to helping others; perhaps to prove as much to themselves as to anyone that it is only love that leads to peace.

These days it is very difficult if not impossible to separate Christianity from Politics. This country was built to be a Christian Empire, two ideas that are in truth fundamentally in opposition. In our lifetimes will not likely see full resolution of that tension, yet the message of Jesus need not get lost in the intractability of church and state. The message of Jesus and Paul are as clear today as they have ever been.

Blessed are those who work and honest day and earn an honest wage, blessed are those who compromise their own comfort for the comfort of others, and those who are recognizable as Christians by the compassion they offer to others; for they are the peacemakers of this world.

Tomorrow may we be reminded not of nationalism or patriotism, but of the original intention of Armistice Day. May we as a nation see this day as an opportunity to strive toward mutual understanding among nations and peace among all people.

Amen