

Worship November 15, 2020

Welcome

I welcome you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We come before God not fearfully but adoringly, and we worship Him not out of duty but with delight.

Lift up your eyes beyond anxieties and ills to our God whose glory exceeds the starry skies, building each other up in faith and joy.

Opening Prayer

Awesome God, you created the world and all that is in it. You blessed each element of creation with your love. You called us from slavery into witness and service. Be with us this day as we gather to worship. Clear our minds of all the distractions which would draw us away from you. Open our hearts and spirits and let your healing and empowering love flow in. Prepare us to be witnesses to your power and love as we use the gifts with which you have blessed us in your service. For we offer this prayer in the name of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Hymn

UMH #103

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (CEB)

The Lord's coming

⁵ We don't need to write to you about the timing and dates, brothers and sisters. ² You know very well that the day of the Lord is going to come like a thief in the night. ³ When they are saying, "There is peace and security," at that time sudden destruction will attack them, like labor pains start with a pregnant woman, and they definitely won't escape. ⁴ But you aren't in darkness, brothers and sisters, so the day won't catch you by surprise like a thief. ⁵ All of you are children of light and children of the day. We don't belong to night or darkness. ⁶ So then, let's not sleep like the others, but let's stay awake and stay sober. ⁷ People who sleep sleep at night, and people who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ Since we belong to the day, let's stay sober, wearing faithfulness and love as a piece of armor that protects our body^[a] and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ God didn't intend for us to suffer his wrath but rather to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ Jesus died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him. ¹¹ So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already.

Meditation

Prayer

What is the definition of an encourager – I can define it as a person, a friend of mine for many years, an encourager until the day she died.

My friend Joyce died a couple years ago. I had known Joyce for many years. We studied together for about 10 years in a weekly early morning bible study. We traveled to Belize together working for a week in mission with the wonderful Belizeans. We shared many conversations, many times of worship and even sang in choir together for a while.

Whenever I was in the same room as Joyce, she would find me and fill me with the most wonderful words of encouragement. I always felt like the most important person in the room after talking with her.

The day of Joyce's funeral I discovered that although I thought her words of encouragement were just for me, I discovered that everyone that knew new felt the same way. Joyce was an encourager.

The dictionary definition of an encourager is someone that

inspires with courage, spirit, or confidence:

excites by assistance, approval:

promotes, advances, or fosters:

Or are you like Lucy van Pelt

In Lucy's world encouragement is sometimes in short supply. There is a Peanuts comic strip that had Lucy van Pelt reading Charlie Brown her typical riot act after the final loss in a very long season of nothing but losses. "This is the worst team that has ever existed, Charlie Brown; we never win, and you are the most horrible manager a team could have!" With that Lucy turns and storms off. In the last panel Charlie Brown calls after her, "That's not very encouraging!"

Another option is to be like Charlie Brown - as he wraps his arms around Snoopy, he says

"I'll always be praying for you".

The late Bishop Paul Martin tells of the time when he "received a new church appointment early in his ministry. The congregation planned a reception for him on his first Sunday. During the reception, everyone came around to greet him except for one man who lingered in the rear of the room. After everyone else had greeted him, this man came forward and simply stood there. The future

bishop asked him, 'What do you do here?' The layman said, 'I look for the preacher's weaknesses.' And he added, 'I'm good at it! But when I find them, that's where I get beneath him, and then I lift him up.'

This defines for me the meaning of what the Apostle Paul is saying in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 11; So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already.

Thessalonica was (and still is) an important seaport about 185 miles north of Athens. In Paul's day, the region in which Thessalonica was located was known as Macedonia. Today, it is northern Greece. Paul visited Thessalonica on his Second Missionary Journey and on three successive Sabbaths they attended the synagogue and presented their case declaring Jesus as the Messiah.

Impressed by the faithfulness of the Thessalonians as they faced persecution, Paul wrote to encourage the Christians in that community with the goal that they would continue to grow in godliness. Paul knew that the people had been exposed to false teaching from those that did not follow the way of Jesus Christ and the grace of God.

Paul's friends at Thessalonica had and continued to struggle. They believed but they still had questions. They had questions about their departed loved ones, and how God was going to bring them back for the gathering of the saints at His second coming.

- Paul assures the Thessalonian Christians that "the dead in Christ will rise first" when Jesus comes again (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Paul told them not to worry, they were believers, they were children of the light, and God would remember them.

He also cautioned them to put on their combat gear – faith, love and hope – and stay awake like responsible soldiers.

- He reminds them that "the day of the Lord (will come) like a thief in the night" (5:2)—and that the unrepentant will find no escape (5:3).

He then told them that their faith will be strengthened as they remind each other of the fact that God hadn't saved them to abandon them; they were his!

- He reminds them also that they are "children of light" (5:5), which assures their salvation (5:8-9).

- He reminds them also that they are "children of light" (5:5), which assures their salvation (5:8-9).

Paul's teachings and encouragement led large numbers of Thessalonians to follow Jesus Christ.

Encouraging strengthens people for tough times and it just plain feels good.

People need lifting in tough times – times like we face today. Times of division, anger, fear and so much more. Our text contains one of the "one another's" of the Bible.

Paul had said to

- love one another,
- help one another,
- be kind to one another,
- not to judge one another,
- and here he says to strengthen or comfort one another with encouragement.

Impressed by the faithfulness of the Thessalonians in the face of persecution, Paul wrote to encourage the Christians in that community with the goal that they would continue to grow in godliness.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians

- love one another,
- help one another,
- be kind to one another,
- not to judge one another,
- and to strengthen, comfort and encouragement one another.

Bill and his Aunt Caroline were at odds with each other. Bill was jealous because Caroline was the number one society leader in town. Caroline was jealous because Bill got more money when the family fortune had been distributed at the reading of the last will. Bill had received 100 million dollars. Caroline had only received 50 million. (Poor baby!)

Until the mid-1890's, Bill and Caroline's dispute was confined to childish, snide remarks at high social gatherings. But then the fighting intensified and became much more visible. In fact, it became the talk of the entire city.

You see, Bill and his Aunt Caroline lived right next door to each other. All that separated them was a beautiful and spacious garden. Caroline's splendid 4-story house was easily the nicer of the 2 dwellings and this really irritated Bill. He had more money - he should have the nicer home.

So Bill tore down his house and in its place built a beautiful 13 story hotel that he called home. This hotel would be the most elegant in the nation - and most importantly, it would overshadow Aunt Caroline's puny house next to it. On March 14, 1893, Bill's hotel was completed - and it, of course, was named after him.

For a while it appeared that Bill had triumphed over his Aunt Caroline - that is until her construction began. One day, Bill came home to find her house torn down. And in its place, a hotel began to be erected - bigger than Bill's, with more rooms, more baths, and more stories.

Bill was enraged - and he immediately announced his plans to add on to his hotel, making it taller than his Aunt Caroline's. Of course, Bill and Caroline's childish game was the talk of the city. And how far it might have progressed we will never know. Fortunately for all concerned, Bill's hotel manager showed more maturity and wisdom than Bill or Caroline did. He began a process of mediation between the 2 warring family members. After all, he reasoned they were family. And they were making fools of themselves before a whole city. Couldn't they possibly work out an equitable agreement?

Bill and Caroline finally accepted his compromise. The two hotels would be joined physically. They would operate as one. And Bill and Caroline would share the profits equally. Instead of squandering their fortunes on childish rivalries, they both could become even richer.

The suggestion worked - and who can even count how many people have enjoyed the luxuries of that hotel that remains in use even to this day in New York City. The hotel that was a combination of buildings built by Bill Waldorf and his Aunt Caroline Astor - known today as the Waldorf-Astoria.

To "edify" means to build up. At the center of Paul's message to the church is that we are not to tear each other apart like Aunt Caroline and Bill, our mission is to build each other up.

Paul is calls to encourage one another.

The point was illustrated in the Boston Marathon a few years ago. One of the notorious points on that grueling course is called "Heartbreak Hill." Thousands of cheering spectators gather there to watch.

During the race a young man was very near total collapse; no one thought he'd make it up ol' Heartbreak. About halfway up an older man, in better shape, came alongside the younger man, put his arm around him, and spoke quietly to him. Together, step by step, they painstakingly made their way up the hill.

Life is like that hill. Many of us are weary and worn by this life. Encouragement. building-up by others is the only hope some of us have!

When Handel's The Messiah was published, one nobleman complimented the composer on the entertainment that he had given the town. "My lord, said Handel, I should be sorry if I only entertained them. I wish to make them better".

We encourage others to make them better, as people, as citizens, believers; that we make each other stronger in Christ, able to endure the Heartbreak Hills of this life.

I do not know what attracted you to the life as a Christ follower, but for me it was helped along by my encouragers. I was encouraged at a young age by my aunt Eva, Mrs. Norwood, Mrs. Cadwell, and later by PD, Julie, Rachael and many more. Their encouragement and willingness to walk alongside me helped me find my calling.

Paul had spent the better part of his life encouraging and building-up others. The final couple of years he spent in jail...a dark, foul place with no company. Talk about needing encouragement! This points us to the reality that we will eventually find ourselves on both sides of any equation.

If you're an encourager, there will come a time, like Paul, when you need encouragement like you need the next breath. And if you're constantly in need of encouragement, don't lose sight of the fact that you can also bring encouraging words or even just your presence to others.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to

- love one another,
- help one another,
- be kind to one another,
- not to judge one another,
- and to strengthen, comfort and encouragement one another.

Every believer needs the encouragement of others. God has designed His church in such a way that we are to give and receive this special ministry from one another.

Jesus Christ was the most encouraging person to ever live. Should not those of us who follow Him be encouragers? Give it! Christ is spoken of as our encourager in II Thessalonians 2: 16, 17: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who has loved us and given us everlasting comfort [encouragement] and good hope by grace, comfort [encourage] your hearts and establish you in every good word and work." If He does it for us, we should do it for others. Amen

Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Heavenly Father, what a wonderful message is contained in this beautiful passage of Scripture. Thank You that You caused Paul to teach this glorious truth so clearly and simply, to the dear believers in Thessalonica. Thank You that I am a member of Christ's body, and am not appointed to wrath - because Jesus took all the punishment that I deserve upon Himself - so that I might be forgiven of my sin, and not fall under Your righteous judgement. I pray that as the day for Christ's return approaches, when He will gather His saints - both living and dead, to Himself, that I will be ready. Thank You that this day will not come on me like a thief in the night, as it does for the unbeliever - thank You for telling us the end from the beginning. Help me to share this message of comfort and hope with those that are saved and those that are lost in their sin, for Your greater glory, in Jesus name I pray, AMEN.

We pray all these things in the name of the Lord that journeys with us through the darkest of valleys and helps us to find new life along the way, Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray as one, saying...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

Hymn TFWS #2284 Joy in the Morning

Offering

Have you ever refused a compliment? Someone tells you you're good at something, and you immediately respond modestly, deflecting the praise as if they were talking about someone else. Paul says one of the gifts of the Spirit is encouragement, and yet so many of us won't let ourselves be encouraged!

The Bible is clear: we all have been given gifts to use. And if the Spirit has given us the gifts, then the gifts must be good ones! Rather than act like we don't have them, we are called to use them wisely to further God's work in this world. We shouldn't do so pridefully, but we also shouldn't bury them, like the fearful slave in the Matthew passage.

The gifts we have been given to share include the abundance of our resources. When we generously give these to God through our church, God multiplies them for the healing of the nations. Let us come to this time of giving, not with timidity or modesty, but with confidence that the gifts we have are for giving. Let us collect our tithes and offerings.

Prayer of Dedication

Giving God, you have graced us with gifts beyond our abilities and empowered us to use them in service to each other. May the gifts we share today be one of the ways we pledge our obedience, shining your light into this world. We are honored to be the recipients of your generosity; may we reflect that gift today and every day. Amen..

HYMN UMH #706 Soon and Very Soon

Benediction

As you have been blessed, now go to be a blessing to others. Go, bringing the news of peace and hope, of healing and love. Go and the God of peace will always go with you. AMEN.