

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, 11/17/2019, Isaiah 65:17-25, Canticle 9, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

This is the penultimate Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday is Christ the King, and then just two weeks from today will be the first Sunday of Advent and the new church year. Can you believe it? And as the church year draws to a close, the readings get wilder. The Gospel is full of scary-sounding judgment: nation will rise against nation. Earthquakes, famines, and plagues. Arrests, persecution, betrayal: yikes! Contrast that with our first two readings: a new heaven and a new earth, with long lives, and wolves and lambs eating together. Canticle 9 is also based on Isaiah: Surely it is God who saves me. So, in these wild, end-of-the-year readings, we have both hope and judgement.

Then in the midst of all that is a reading from the second letter to the church in Thessalonica. The word "idleness" caught my eye, because this time of year few of us are idle, and we will probably be drawn deeper and deeper into a frenzy of activity, even while here in church we will hear an Advent message of "slow down." How do we slow down when our culture tells us all we have to do to prepare for the holidays? Thanksgiving is just a week and a half away. Soon it's time to thaw the turkey. Soon the grocery stores will be horribly packed. We need to pick up pumpkin before it's all replaced with peppermint!

Paul's admonishment about idleness in this letter to a long-ago church might seem easily dismissed, because our to-do list here at St. David's makes idleness impossible. We need to hire a new parish administrator before the first of the year. We need to chase down those of you who haven't turned in a pledge card so we can finalize a budget. We have to approve an emergency plan that the safety committee has been working on for a year. We need to make sure people in the hospital feel loved and get the attention they need when they go home. We need to come up with new pew cards for new families who come expecting a nursery; continue preparing for confirmation that will happen sometime in the spring but we don't have a date for yet because we won't have a new bishop until February first.

We need to recruit the perfect vestry fits for fellowship, stewardship and pastoral care for our upcoming January meeting. We need to continue offering three services on Sundays and one on Wednesdays as well as special services and sermons and music for the Longest Night, Christmas Eve, and Epiphany. But no pressure.

So the admonishment against idleness might be easy to ignore, but really, Paul isn't saying, "Look busy" or even "stay busy." When we compete with each other for who's the busiest, we all lose, including God. When we get too busy to pay attention to loved ones, it's a spiritual problem. When we get too busy to pray, it's a spiritual problem. When church is too busy and coming to church feels like another job, it's a spiritual problem. I don't want any of you to feel like that.

But I also don't want you to feel like a consumer at church. I want St. David's to be a community where you want to participate, to give of your time, of yourself. I don't want you to see the church as a service organization where you can show up from time to time to get something. I

want us to work together to provide ministry to each other and to our neighborhood. That's the kind of ministry that Paul talks about in this letter in second Thessalonians.

Today's epistle ends with "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." How can we work together as the church and not grow weary, especially during a time like this, when there's so much going on?

Don't take on too much at church. I try to always emphasize this with new members, because when you find a new church and everything seems spiritual and exciting, we want more and more and more, and can take on too much. This can happen to those who have been around for years as well. We think that when we take on a volunteer gig at St. David's, it's a life sentence. So please hear me: don't take on so much that church feels like a job. But do participate in something beyond showing up on Sunday. Participate in our monthly food collections. Come to Bible study if you're available during the week, or a dinner on the town if you work during the day. We'd love to have you on the stewardship commission, but don't commit to being on that *and* the worship commission *and* fellowship commission *and* finance commission *and* outreach and on and on and on.

But besides not overcommitting or romanticizing "busy-ness," one way to curb our weariness can be to remember why we're doing what we're doing. We give to our church because our lives have been transformed due to the love of Jesus. We do what we do out of love.

I've been having some trouble, due to busy-ness, making hospital visits. I had a clergy conference and evening meetings and Gary is out of town and one parishioner is in rehab until 4 PM; but last Wednesday, I finally made time to visit two parishioners in the hospital, and I can't tell you how much it buoyed my soul and lifted my weariness. One man had a stroke in Germany and only made it back to the states last weekend, and I didn't know how I would find him. But he could talk, and wanted prayer, and I didn't stay too long because I didn't want to wear him out; but getting to visit him on behalf of our church, and to tell him of our prayers, and to hear him ask that we keep praying for him: I wasn't weary after that. I then went to go visit Rick, and it was a little before four so I waited in his room; and then Rick came into the room on his own, pulling his wheelchair along with his left foot, and I have rarely seen a face so happy to see me. And I know that's not me-Elizabeth, but me the rector of St. David's, offering care on behalf of our whole church. Rick's a long way from all better, but he is such a long way from where he was the last time I'd seen him.

If I had thought about all the things I still had to do that day, weariness would have won. When I kept in mind these two beloved members of our community, and my privilege of getting to see them on behalf of all of you, and to remind them of God's love, and to hold their hands and pray: that's why I do this.

Before I went to see them, I had a visit from a stranger who saw the sign about our labyrinth, and wanted to see it herself. I had just walked and prayed the labyrinth, and she asked me about my experience, and again: I remembered why I do what I do.

Why do we have potlucks? Why do we wash dishes in the parish hall? Why do we teach our young people about the church? Why do we need lightbulbs to function during worship services? Remembering why we do what we do can help us when we are weary.

The Isaiah reading talks about new heavens and a new earth. That reading calls us to hope, and that's the root of Paul imploring people to "work" in Thessalonians: this work is not to exhaust themselves for Jesus, but to remember and believe the promises and the dreams. Of no more weeping. Of no hurt and destruction. Of laboring together in love, looking outward, growing in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, Paul wrote, do not be weary in doing what is right.