

Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

October 18, 2020 | Pentecost +20

Collect for Proper 24

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. ~BCP 235

Isaiah 45:1-7 NRSV

In this Hebrew Bible reading the Lord anoints Cyrus, King of Persia, to be God's agent in freeing the chosen people from exile.

¹ Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him—and the gates shall not be closed: ² I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³ I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. ⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, ⁶ so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 NRSV

In company with Silvanus and Timothy, Paul greets the new Christians of Thessalonica, giving thanks for their faith and their conversion from idols to the worship of the true and living God.

¹ ¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace

² We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just

as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake.

⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹ For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Matthew 22:15-22 NRSV

In our gospel lesson Jesus answers a question about taxation by teaching that people should pay what belongs to the emperor to the emperor and the things of God to God.

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” ²¹ They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” ²² When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Psalms 96:1-9 BCP 612

Our Psalm response is a hymn of trust in the Lord. God will guard and deliver the one who loves and seeks refuge with God.

- 1 Sing to the Lord a new song; *
sing to the Lord, all the whole earth.
- 2 Sing to the Lord and bless his Name; * proclaim the good news of his
salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations *
and his wonders among all peoples.
- 4 For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; * he is more to be
feared than all gods.

- 5 As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; * but it is the Lord who made the heavens.
- 6 Oh, the majesty and magnificence of his presence! * Oh, the power and the splendor of his sanctuary!
- 7 Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples; * ascribe to the Lord honor and power.
- 8 Ascribe to the Lord the honor due his Name; * bring offerings and come into his courts.
- 9 Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; * let the whole earth tremble before him.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NRSV

October 18, 2020 | Proper 24A
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES



1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. A Pastoral Perspective

By Jill Y. Crainshaw, Associate Professor and Academic Dean, Wake Forest University Divinity School, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 689

Susan simultaneously pastored seven small congregations in the mountains of Virginia. Most of her colleagues never understood how she managed what, from their perspectives, had to be a chaotic and complex task. Preaching responsibilities alone seemed to them enough to tax Susan’s mind, soul, and body. Several lay ministers assisted Susan, but in the minds and hearts of most congregants in those small rural churches, she was the beloved pastor.

Susan was a contemporary version of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century traveling clergy, or circuit preachers. Circuit preachers, popularly called “circuit riders” or “saddleback riders,” were common sights, particularly in American Methodism during the Second and Third Great Awakenings. Due to a clergy shortage, some pastors were assigned multiple congregations. Riding on horseback from one “charge” to another, these pastors traveled light, reportedly carrying only what could fit into saddlebags.

Susan traveled from church to church in an old Honda Civic rather than on horseback, but like early circuit riders, she provided a pastoral

presence to communities unable to afford full-time ministers. As for Susan's churches, they learned to share with one another their pastor, their weekly "collections," and their ministries. Susan spoke often about how she "stayed in touch" with congregations between her monthly preaching visits to each. Few congregants in those years (1982–88) had access to e-mail. Hand-scripted letters became Susan's primary way to encourage and advise communities during her absences from them.

"I learned over time," Susan recalled. "Letters sometimes say more, sometimes less, than you intend. When letters are the primary way we communicate with one another, we have to exercise particular care about what we say. We also have to let the ink flow from a well of gratitude. Writing and then sending letters when angry or frustrated can lead to unhappy results. Also, we have to keep in mind the lives and stories of the people who will read the letters. Most of all, we have to be prepared to be misunderstood on occasion and to stay in conversation about what we really meant by what we wrote."

Paul is a kindred spirit to Susan and other circuit-riding preachers throughout history. Paul, like Susan, corresponded by letter with his multiple congregations. We can learn a great deal about pastoral leadership and communicating the gospel from Paul's letter to the Thessalonian church.

Paul is a complex biblical character. Some interpreters extol Paul's theological views. Others know firsthand the painful power of Paul's voice when interpreters turn that voice against them. Still others wrestle with Paul's sometimes strident representation of himself as authoritative leader. Each of these perspectives points to challenges of understanding Paul's first-century message.

Often overlooked is the relational texture of Paul's writings. Paul wrote letters, distinct forms of communication intended to encourage, teach, and sometimes reprimand particular congregations where he was deemed pastoral leader. Paul did not imagine a twenty-first-century readership. First Thessalonians was crafted for people with whom Paul had a personal bond.

When contemporary readers delve into the letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, they struggle to hear in Paul's ancient words a gospel word for today. Thus they sometimes miss the vibrancy of Paul's letter-writing style. A skilled correspondent, Paul inventively wove together words, images, and ideas common to his context. Paul's letters illuminate the world of his day, even as they reveal theological values and ideas. Paul's

letters, particularly the letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, also reveal the concern with which he communicated with each of his churches.

Paul cared deeply for the Christians at Thessalonica. The opening words of 1 Thessalonians reflect this. The first verse sets the tone: “Grace to you and peace” (1:1c). As the first chapter unfolds, Paul’s gratitude for the work he and the Thessalonian community do together to carry gospel wisdom into places like Macedonia and Achaia (vv. 7–8) is evident.

This is the first letter Paul scripted as a “circuit-riding” preacher. In it, he affirms and encourages Thessalonian gospel collaborators. He has great affection for these believers, who have kept on ministering in spite of persecution (v. 6). Paul enjoys, and perhaps personally needs, the friendship of this community of coministers.

Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica invites the attention of contemporary believers. Certainly, it is not without interpretive challenges, often posed by Paul’s epistles. However, the letter overall depicts a pastoral leader intent on mentoring a community of believers. Paul characterizes his vocational identity in verse 2 with words that texturize the remainder of the letter: “We always give thanks to God for all of you.” Paul’s relationship with the church at Thessalonica is a relationship enriched and emboldened by thankfulness.

Circuit-riding preachers of the nineteenth-century variety are a thing of the past. A number of pastoral leaders today travel between two, or perhaps three, congregations. This is no doubt a challenging vocational responsibility; but “saddlebag riders” are no more. Also, technological innovations—text messages, cell phones, Skype, Internet—have bathed correspondence in the speed of light. Words now travel faster, farther, and with greater ease than physical bodies.

Paul’s handwritten and snail-mailed words of greeting to the church at Thessalonica continue to offer wisdom for today’s faith communities and their leaders. Congregations are to be bonded to one another in Christ by a spirit of thanksgiving for one another. What are the gifts of such a spirit? A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us as believers to be more intentional and thoughtful in all of the ways we communicate with one another. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us toward greater communal intimacy. A spirit of thanksgiving can motivate us to forgive and seek forgiveness, especially as each of us works to be understood and to understand. Finally, a spirit of thanksgiving can and should motivate us toward collaborative ministries that spin out threads of relational authenticity and depth.

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

There is little doubt that 1 Thessalonians, the 13th book in the NT canon, is an authentic letter written by the apostle Paul to the Christian community at Thessalonica in Macedonia. It is the oldest document contained in the NT.

David Noel Freedman, ed., "Thessalonians, First and Second Epistles to The," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 515.

Saint Paul

Paul, St (d. prob. AD 62–5), the 'Apostle of the Gentiles'. Born during the first years of the Christian era, the future St Paul, originally 'Saul', was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, a native of *Tarsus in Cilicia, said by Acts to possess Roman citizenship. He was brought up a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5, Acts 26:5) and perhaps had some of his education at Jerusalem under *Gamaliel (so Acts 22:3). This life in Judaism (Gal. 1:14) gave him his trust in God, experience of the Law, and a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as his methods of arguing from Scripture. As a Jew of the Diaspora he spoke and wrote Greek and shows some knowledge of rhetoric. Within a short time of the Crucifixion, he came in contact with the new 'Way' of the followers of Jesus, apparently in Palestine, and persecuted the Church (1 Cor. 15:9, Gal. 1:13). Acts 7:58 represents him as present at the martyrdom of St Stephen, and 9:1–2 as authorized by the High Priest to arrest converts in Damascus. As he drew near he was himself converted.

... The sketch in the Acts of St Paul of a 'man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked ...' is probably imaginative, though Paul admits to his weak bodily presence (2 Cor. 10:10) and a 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:7).

F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1243.



A book and sword are the common attributes of Saint Paul

The book carried by Saint Paul represents his epistles in the New Testament of the Bible.

The sword is a reminder of the means of his martyrdom – he was beheaded in Rome in 67 AD.

[Recognizing Saints: book and sword](#)
The National Gallery, London England