

Holy Trinity Hastings 19 April 2020

1 Thessalonians 2

Good morning! It is my privilege and joy to be part of your Christian family this morning.

My name is Michael Collie. I work with SparkLit. At SparkLit we make Christian books accessible, available and affordable in countries where commitment is strong but resources are scarce.

Every month Holy Trinity Hastings helps to finance our work. I want to thank you for supporting the work of SparkLit and our partners in difficult places.

Your support at this time is especially appreciated. Our brothers and sisters in Cambodia, Colombia, Congo thank God for you. Your support is very encouraging. Thank you.

I would like to bring you words of encouragement from the Bible and an encouraging story from Cambodia.

First, let us look at today's reading from chapter two of Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul was separated from the Thessalonians. Paul was forced to flee Thessalonica and abandon the Thessalonians. (You can read about this humiliating adventure in Acts chapter 17.) Paul didn't have a chance to say good bye. He may never see them again. Paul loves the church at Thessalonica but he is prevented from being with them. In chapter 3 Paul describes the pain of separation as "unbearable". So Paul wrote this letter to be close to the people he longs to see.

Frustration of being separated did not send Paul into hibernation. Paul did not say "wake me up when this crisis is over" and go into an induced coma.

No, to encourage his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica, Paul wrote them a letter. Paul's letter crossed hundreds of kilometres to encourage the Thessalonians. Paul's letter crosses hundreds of years to encourage us.

Please open your Bible at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Let us pray.

Our Father God, we thank you for preserving this letter for us.

Speak to us now, feed us now, as we read the Bible together.

We ask the Holy Spirit will teach us and and give us the courage and power to obey you. Amen.

This morning you woke up. This morning you were given another day of life. Why? Do you ever ask yourself “why am I alive?” Well, evidently God wants you to love somebody. Evidently God wants you to tell somebody about Jesus. That is why you are alive. That is why God has given you life.

Evidently, God want you to live during this pandemic. Why? What does the pandemic mean? The pandemic means that we have to find new ways to love people. The pandemic means that we have to find new ways to tell people about Jesus. The pandemic also means that there will be new opportunities to love people. The pandemic also means that there will be new opportunities to tell people about Jesus.

Have you noticed that our concept of “neighbour” has expanded to include everyone in the whole wide world? Everyone, that is, except the person next door? Now is a good time to get to know people in your neighbourhood.

In this beautiful letter, Paul tells us how to share the good news about Jesus. It is simple. Sharing the gospel is simple. Simple but costly.

How do we share the good news? We share the good news with words and actions.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 8:

⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our lives, because you have become very dear to us.

Will you share not only the gospel of God but also your life, your self? Your own soul? The real you?

What does it mean to share not only the gospel of God but also our own life?

Share the gospel

Well, first, it means that you will actually share the gospel.

To share the gospel, like Paul, you will pass on to others the simple truths that you have received.

That Jesus Christ died for our sins,
That Jesus Christ was buried,
That Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and
That Jesus Christ will return.

It means that like Paul you will allow this unadorned gospel to shape your character, your life, your ministry, your mission.

It is not Paul's gospel. It is not the Anglican gospel. We read in verse 8 that it is "God's gospel". The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Paul writes in Romans chapter 1 verse 16:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Words are necessary. You may have heard someone say "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words." This adage is not only falsely attributed to Francis of Assisi, it is also a falsehood.

While it is true that words without actions are hollow, it is also true that actions without words are meaningless. Words are necessary. We have to be told that Jesus died for our sins, that he was raised from the dead and that he is coming again. This is not something we can work out for ourselves.

We don't have to invent anything. We don't have to be eloquent or clever. Like Paul we pass on to others the simple truth about Jesus just as we have received it. Paul shared the gospel with generosity and simplicity. (1 Thessalonians 2:7)

⁷ Instead, we were like young children among you.

Paul shared the gospel to please God, not to please people. Paul says in verses 4 to 6:

⁴ We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else.

Like Paul we share the gospel to please God, not to please people. This means that we do not adjust the gospel to make it more palatable or less offensive. We add nothing to the gospel. We take nothing from the gospel.

The gospel is not about our faithfulness. The gospel is about the faithfulness of Jesus. If Jesus is not the hero, it's not the gospel!

Share your self

What does it mean to share not only the gospel of God but also our life?

First, it means that you will actually share the gospel. But, how will you share not only the gospel of God but also your life? How will you share your soul? How will you share your self?

I pray that, like Paul you will be tender and gentle and generous. In verse 7 we read that Paul cared for the Thessalonians ...

^{7b}Like a nursing mother cares for her children.

What does it mean to be gentle? It will mean that you will listen before you speak. When communicating by phone or video this requires patience. Don't rush to fill the silence.

I pray that, like Paul, you will love unconditionally like a nursing mother and a dotting father. Verses 11 and 12 ...

¹¹For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

I pray that, even when separated by distance, like Paul, you will find ways to hold your friends close.

The currency of love is time. Love and grace take time. Are you too busy to be merciful? Is your day so full that there is no time to notice how people are coping or what they need? The pandemic is an opportunity to rearrange your priorities. The pandemic is an opportunity to rearrange your diary.

I pray that, like Paul, you will not only empathise but also suffer with your brothers and sisters in need.

To love is costly. I pray that loving your neighbour will be painful. Because this will be evidence that you have shared not only the gospel of God but also your life.

Will you share not only the gospel of God but also your life?

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Last year while I was in Cambodia I met a young man. His name is Vann Menghoeun. This is his story.

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My name is Vann Menghoeun. I wanted to become a Buddhist monk. But because I have only one arm the head monk at the monastery said “no”. I was not surprised. I knew this taboo was consistent with Buddhist teaching but I felt angry. I decided to change my religion. I was attracted by the bodhisattva Guanyin and began to study Taoism until I again discovered that having an incomplete body would make it impossible for me to enter a monastic order.

A Christian friend included me in his social circle. Together we went to the beach for picnics. He invited me to church and gave me a Bible. I am by nature curious, earnest and thorough so I started to read the Bible beginning at Genesis chapter one verse one. God spoke to me when I read Psalm 139:13. “For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” I was overwhelmed by gratitude and joy. I decided to trust in Jesus.

I have a lot to be thankful for. My father is a labourer and couldn’t afford to send me to university. But God enabled me to study at university, use a computer, get a job, marry and find a house. I was awarded a government scholarship. A pastor gave me a computer. At Meanchey University I earned a degree in business and tourism and now work with the Red Cross in their Department of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting.

In my spare time I distribute Christian books published in Phnom Penh by Fount of Wisdom. These books are published in the Khmer language for people from a Buddhist background.

If we want to become more like Jesus we first have to know him. Reading helps us to know and follow Jesus. The Bible is a big book. Christian books help us to digest God’s word, understand it and put it into practice. Books are especially useful for young people making big decisions and church leaders teaching and caring for their people.

I sell books in universities and churches. I choose books that will complement each conference, lecture or sermon. Before I recommend a book, I read it so I can explain what it will teach us and how it will help us. Once people discover how useful books can be, they ask me what they should read next. They ask me to tell them when I think a new book might be important for them.

I like to read. Reading is good for you. Reading is encouraging and makes us strong. Books helped me choose and court my wife.

Will you pray that books will also help me become a faithful and loving husband and father?

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How did Menghoeun become a Christian?

Someone shared with him not only the gospel but also their self. What did Menghoeun's friend do?

A Christian friend included me in his social circle. Together we went to the beach for picnics. He invited me to church and gave me a Bible.

The currency of love is time. In Cambodia, hanging out with a disabled person is not cool. Menghoeun's Christian friend offered companionship and hospitality.

How did Menghoeun meet Jesus?

God spoke to me when I read the Bible.

Menghoeun was not persuaded by an evangelist, a vision or miracle.

While reading the Bible, he learned that he was created by a loving God and decided to trust in Jesus. I love the way Menghoeun simultaneously recognises God as Creator and Saviour. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus is the hero, it's the gospel!

Will you share not only the gospel of God but also your own life?

You will not do this on your own. You have been equipped and approved by God to be trusted with the gospel. (1 Thessalonians 2:3–4)

³For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God.

Of course we can only share the gospel in power of the Holy Spirit.

(1 Thessalonians 1:5) Without the witness of the Spirit our witness is futile.

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote (2 Corinthians 2:15–16) ...

¹⁵For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are the

stench of death to death; to the other, a fragrance from life to life.

Who is sufficient for these things?

Who is equal to such a task?

YOU ARE!

“For [you] are not,
like so many,
peddlers of [fake news],
but as men [and women] of sincerity,
as commissioned by God,
in the sight of God you speak in Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 2:17)

Let us pray.

Our Father God.
We thank you
that you showed your love for us.
For while we were still sinners,
Jesus died for us.
Amen.