

The Message of the Mission
1 Thessalonians 1.2-3
Series: Mobilizing the Mission
January 17, 2021
The Village Church at Shell Point

I. **Mobilizing the Mission**

- A. 2020 was the pits
 - 1. But as it turns out, it all could very possibly be the result of recognized scientific laws
- B. Laws of Thermodynamics
 - 1. First Law: Energy in a closed system can be transformed from one form to another, but can neither be created nor destroyed.
 - 2. Second Law: An isolated system not in equilibrium will tend to entropy, or disorder and randomness, until reaching equilibrium.
 - 3. Third Law: As temperature approaches absolute zero, the entropy of a system approaches a constant minimum.
 - 4. Fourth Law: Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.
- C. Ok, so the Fourth Law is not actually one of the accepted Laws of Thermodynamics
 - 1. But it may as well be
 - a. But also known as Murphy's Law, it appears to have demonstrated its explanatory power in 2020
- D. I was talking with someone recently who confessed at how frustrating 2020 was for him
 - 1. It was frustrating because he said, "I am a planner. And in 2020 we would plan and cancel, plan and cancel, plan and cancel."
- E. So what do you do with a mission?
 - 1. Remember last week, I called attention to the extraordinary mission of the invasion of Europe by Allied forces on D-Day
 - a. A mission in which almost nothing went as planned
 - b. In which no military objective for June 6, 1944 was achieved
 - c. Murphy's Law seemed to be in effect – even though the "Murphy" for whom the law was named had not yet coined the phrase
- F. The Church is on a mission
 - 1. We call it **The Great Commission**
 - a. And if we were to study the history of the Great Commission – all 2,000 years of it – we would discover many examples of Murphy's Law
 - b. Mistakes were made
 - c. Cultural and political events became obstacles
 - d. Unforeseen and unintended consequences unfolded
 - e. All of which frustrated the best plans of God's people in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth
 - 2. And yet, the Great Commission continued toward fulfillment

- a. In which of the more than 12,000 people groups existing in the world, fewer than 2,000 remain without a gospel witness
 - 3. Which leads me to suggest yet another Law of Thermodynamics – The Immutable Law of Ecclesiological Dynamics
 - a. Jesus will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it
 - 4. Not even Murphy can do anything about it!
 - G. And our church is on a mission
 - 1. **We are building a community of forgiveness, purpose, and hope in Jesus Christ**
 - 2. While 2020 threw a lot of obstacles in our way
 - a. Threw many of our plans in disarray
 - b. Changed the way we do much of our ministry
 - 3. Nevertheless, the mission continues to be the mission
 - a. Building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ is even more important in these challenging times than it has ever been
 - H. Last week we considered the first part of our mission – building a community
 - 1. We explored Romans 12.3ff to get a glimpse of what such a community looks like
 - a. **How we understand ourselves** – with humility
 - b. **How we understand the body** – acknowledging and affirming each person’s gifts and ministry
 - c. **How we understand love** – in all of its many dimensions
 - 2. Building a community is about building a humble-minded, gift-affirming, love-expanding community
 - a. Such a community is even more important in Covid times than in more normal times
 - I. This week we consider the core of our mission statement
 - 1. The three central elements of the mission statement
 - a. Which define the content of our mission
 - 2. Forgiveness, purpose and hope
 - J. Text
 - 1. **1 Thessalonians 1:2–3** (NASB95) — 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father...
- II. **The Origin of Forgiveness, Purpose and Hope**
- A. Where did forgiveness, purpose and hope come from?
 - 1. Thanks for asking
 - B. Forgiveness, purpose and hope came out of our strategic planning process that we began not too long after I began ministry here in 2013
 - 1. But I have to say that those three elements emerged – I believe given to us by God – but they emerged when I made one of my most important planning decisions in 2013

2. And that planning decision was this: to do nothing for a year
- C. Not nothing nothing
 1. Obviously we engaged in ministry during that first year
 - a. Preaching
 - b. Teaching
 - c. Praying
 - d. Visiting
 - e. Many other things
 2. But I did nothing by way of strategic planning
 - a. That's because I wanted to take a year to understand our community
 - b. To understand TVC
 - c. To understand SP
 - d. To understand South Fort Myers
 - e. To understand our people
 3. In other words, my most important planning decision was to listen
 - a. To listen to what people said
 - b. To listen to the rhythm and flow of our community
 - c. To listen to the Lord
- D. Three things kept coming back to me during that year
- E. **Forgiveness**
 1. Not everybody in this community knows Jesus
 - a. Not everybody in this community trusts in Jesus alone for salvation
 2. And if we don't trust Jesus alone for our salvation, the Bible tells us, Jesus tells us, that we're not forgiven
 3. And we're a senior community
 - a. We're all on the home stretch of life
 - b. We don't have much time to get this figured out
 4. So forgiveness became central in my mind – and in the minds of our staff and of our strategic planning group – as critical in a community like ours
- F. **Purpose**
 1. This is a retirement community
 - a. Which means that practically everybody in our community – and most of those in our church – have peculiar status of being retired
 - b. We've left, in many ways, our life's work behind us
 - c. We've moved here
 - d. And so we wonder, now what?
 - e. What am I supposed to do?
 - f. Who am I, now that I've left a former life behind
 2. The issue is purpose
 - a. What does God have for me in this place, at this time, with my abilities and gifts?
 3. For as long as the Lord leaves me on this planet, how can be useful to the kingdom
 - a. How can I participate in the Great Commission?

- G. **Hope**
 - 1. I also learned that as we approach the finish line, not everybody has the same experience
 - a. Some people fall on their faces at the finish line – depressed, in despair, bitter
 - b. Some people stumble across the finish line – confused, exhausted, ignorant of what lies on the other side
 - c. But some people sprint through the tape in victory and celebration
 - 2. A community of forgiveness and purpose should also be a community of hope
 - a. In which, through our relationship with Jesus Christ, be able to anticipate with great expectation an eternity of glory in the presence of our Triune God
 - 3. So as we all come down the home stretch, and approach the finish line, it is a particular calling of TVC to help one another look forward to an eternity with the eternal One
 - H. So forgiveness, purpose and hope is the particular calling of this local congregation, at this time, and in this place
 - I. **1 Thessalonians 1:2–3** (NASB95) — 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father...
 - 1. Work of faith
 - 2. Labor of love
 - 3. Steadfastness of hope
 - J. Work of faith – describes how forgiveness was experienced by these Thessalonian Christians
 - K. Labor of love – summarizes the purpose which drives the Thessalonians to participate in a Great Commission community
 - L. Steadfastness of hope – describes how the Thessalonians were sustained by their anticipation of a glorious future
 - M. So that verse encapsulates all three elements of our mission statement
- III. **Forgiveness**
- A. If anything is central to the Christian life it is faith
 - 1. Not just faith in itself
 - a. Certainly not faith in faith
 - 2. But faith in Jesus Christ
 - B. Paul, quoting the OT prophet Habakkuk, said “The just shall live by faith”
 - C. **Romans 3:21–25** (NASB95) — 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith...

1. We lack a righteousness of our own
 - a. If we were to trust our own righteousness – have faith in our own righteousness – we would never measure up
 - b. Isaiah – our righteousness is as filthy rags
2. But Paul says that the righteousness of God – a righteousness that we desperately need – is available through faith in Jesus Christ
 - a. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - b. But through faith in Jesus Christ we can be saved
3. “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus”
 - a. Justified – declared not guilty!
 - b. **Romans 4:7** (NASB95) — 7 “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.
 - c. There is forgiveness only in Jesus Christ
 - d. As we have faith in Him, believe in Him, trust in His work we can be forgiven
4. “Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith”
 - a. **Propitiation** – Christ’s sacrifice was a **wrath removing sacrifice**
 - b. The wrath we genuinely deserved because of our sin was taken by Christ upon Himself on the cross
 - c. And as we believe in Him, have faith in His death on the cross, trust in Christ alone for our salvation – we are freed from wrath
5. That’s the essence of forgiveness
 - a. Only by faith in Jesus Christ can we be forgiven
- D. The passage in 1 Thessalonians speaks of the **“work of faith”**
 1. Raises the issue of the relation between faith and works
- E. What “work of faith” does not mean
 1. Does not mean that by faith we are earning our salvation
 - a. **Romans 3:27–28** (NASB95) — 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.
 2. Elsewhere faith itself is a gift of God
 - a. **Ephesians 2:8** (NASB95) — 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...
 3. Works are the fruit of faith, the result of faith
 - a. **Ephesians 2:10** (NASB95) — 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
- F. So what does Paul mean in 1 Thessalonians by the “work of faith”
 1. It simply means that faith needs to be exercised by the believer
 - a. It is the way we receive our salvation
 - b. It is the way we express our salvation

- c. It is the way we grow into the lifestyle of holy living and faithful service
 - 2. When Paul says that he and his acquaintances “give thanks to God always for all of you... constantly bearing in mind your work of faith” he means that they hear of demonstrable evidence of their saving faith
 - a. In other words, these people are forgiven – and they act like it!
 - 3. They act like it
 - a. By forgiving others – “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”
 - b. By serving others – Romans 12:10 (NASB95) — 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor...
 - c. By witnessing of Jesus Christ to others
 - 4. All of those things are the outgrowth of faith, the fruit of faith
 - a. They are the work of faith
- G. And Paul thanks God for that!
 - 1. He doesn’t thank them for that – he thanks God!
 - a. Because God ultimately is the source of their faith
 - b. Which they faithfully exercise

IV. Purpose

- A. “Labor of love”
 - 1. The Thessalonian Christians were fully engaged as Great Commission Christians
 - a. They labored for the kingdom of Christ
 - b. And their labor was the outflow of their love for Christ and for His people
- B. Listen to what Paul says about these people
 - 1. **1 Thessalonians 1:6–7** (NASB95) — 6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.
 - a. Their response to the gospel was evident to Christians throughout the region
 - 2. **1 Thessalonians 1:8** (NASB95) — 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.
 - a. These were a witnessing people
 - b. These were a missionary people
 - c. They spoke the gospel to others in their region and beyond
 - d. These were Great Commission Christians
 - 3. **1 Thessalonians 1:9** (NASB95) — 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God...
 - a. They were developing a reputation

- b. People all over the region knew what kind of remarkable people these Thessalonians were
 - c. How they had changed from pagan idol-worshippers to Jesus worshippers
 - 4. All of this was evidence of their labor of love
 - a. Their works of service
 - b. Motivated and activated by their love of Jesus
 - c. Who saved them and who sanctifies them
 - C. All this to say, this was a church with purpose
 - 1. They knew who they were in Jesus
 - a. And they acted in accordance with their new identity in Christ
 - D. Do you have that kind of purpose?
 - 1. Are you forgiven – and then act in accordance with that forgiveness?
 - 2. Do you have the kind of reputation that these Thessalonians had?
 - a. Reputation of faith evident in labors of love?
 - E. That’s what it means to be a community of purpose
- V. **Hope**
 - A. **1 Thessalonians 1:2–3** (NASB95) — 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father...
 - B. **“Steadfastness of hope”**
 - 1. Not only did they have the assurance of the eternity they anticipate in Jesus
 - a. But they persevered in that hope
 - b. Even in difficulty and in tribulation – they maintained their hope in Jesus
 - C. **1 Thessalonians 1:9–10** (NASB95) — 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with 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, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.
 - 1. These were a people who were waiting for Jesus to come
 - a. Anticipating His coming
 - 2. **2 Timothy 4:7–8** (NASB95) — 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.
 - a. These Thessalonians have loved His appearing
 - 3. **Titus 2:11–13** (NASB95) — 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...
 - D. The Thessalonians were a people of hope
 - 1. They longed for appearing of Jesus Christ

2. They looked forward to eternity with the Savior
 3. They anticipated seeing the Savior
 - E. Study with the Pastor – studied 1 John
 1. **1 John 3:2–3** (NASB95) — 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.
 2. We long to be with Jesus
 - a. We long to be transformed into the likeness of Christ in His fullness
 - b. A transformation which has begun in every true believer
 - c. But which will be consummated by the Savior when we see Him
 - F. That is the great hope of every Christian
 1. Do you have that hope?
 2. Is your faith genuine? – do you trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation?
 3. Are you a person with purpose? Is your labor fueled by your love of Jesus Christ?
 - a. Are you fully engaged as a participant, as a co-worker, in the Great Commission?
 4. And do you have the hope that only comes through faith in Jesus?
 - a. Hope in His coming
 - b. Hope in the resurrection
 - c. Hope in the transformation
 - d. Hope in anticipation of being present with the One who is love Himself – for God is love?
- VI. One final word
- A. Do you realize how this message of the mission, this core of our mission statement, fully encompasses the entirety of our lives?
 1. That it expresses who Christ is for us
 - a. In our **past**
 - b. In our **present**
 - c. In our **future**?
 - B. Think about it
 1. **Forgiveness – dealing with our past**
 - a. What does the grace of God do for our past?
 - b. One of the things that so struck me in learning about our community is how everyone has a story
 - c. Everyone has a history
 - d. History is not always pretty
 - e. How do we deal with our sin?
 - f. Only Jesus can forgive us of our sin
 - g. Building a community of forgiveness means a fellowship in which we help one another experience the love of the Savior for our past transgressions
 2. **Purpose – the present**

- a. It's what gets us up in the morning
 - b. It's why we're still here
 - c. It's what God has for us now, in this place at this time
- 3. **Hope – the future**
 - a. Only Jesus can give us confidence about the future
 - b. Only Jesus can enflame our anticipation of eternity with Him
- C. That's the message of the gospel for everyone
 - 1. Forgiveness, purpose, hope
 - 2. But it is also the message for TVC
 - a. Particularly suited for this community
- D. Will you embrace this mission with us?