

Isaiah 65: 17-25

2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13

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### **“Walk Together”**

I heard a hugely important story this week in the news. And no, it had nothing to do with the election. so maybe you didn't hear about it, but I found it quite interesting.

Recently an Australian man was walking in the wilderness and...as they say...nature called. The man, Cliff walked up this creek bed into this gorge and found this amazing spring surrounded by rock art, said the ABC news. "A man getting out of the car to go to the toilet led to the discovery of one of the most important sites in Australian pre-history." His findings helped scientists re-date the area to find that civilization has been there 10,000 earlier than they thought. The title of this article: bathroom trip leads to ancient Australian discovery.

This was so hilarious to me. And I think it's mostly funny because it's so strange. It's not the way the world works, 99% of the time.

This guy wandered around by himself and made a hugely important discovery. I'm almost jealous. I wish I could walk out my front door and tumble into an undiscovered cave system or something.

I bring this up because I find it interesting WHY this is a news-worthy story: it's unique because we do not often accomplish great things when we walk alone. And we do not accomplish great things without a little effort.

So, this morning we will hear a scripture from the apostle Paul from one of his letters to the people living in Thessolonika about walking together and making some effort means to him in the Christian walk.

2 Thessalonians

Brothers and sisters, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to stay away from every brother or sister who lives an undisciplined life that is not in line with the traditions that you received from us. <sup>7</sup> You yourselves know how you need to imitate us because we were not undisciplined when we were with you. <sup>8</sup> We didn't eat anyone's food without paying for it. Instead, we worked night and day with effort and hard work so that we would not impose on you. <sup>9</sup> We did this to give you an example to imitate, not because we didn't have a right to insist on financial support. <sup>10</sup> Even when we were with you we were giving you this command: "If anyone doesn't want to work, they shouldn't eat." <sup>11</sup> We hear that some of you are living an undisciplined life. They aren't working, but they are meddling in other people's business. <sup>12</sup> By the Lord Jesus Christ, we command and encourage such people to work quietly and put their own food on the table. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, don't get discouraged in doing what is right.

Maybe this scripture doesn't sit super well with you right now. Maybe you are feeling discouraged and tired out by the world post-election: I've only talked to one person who is perfectly happy with everything that has been going on this week post-election, and that's my family member who is a self-proclaimed anarchist. Maybe all you want is a little comfort today, to know that everything will be okay.

So, what are we doing with this scripture doing here? Doesn't this sound a little like the apostle Paul saying that you're lazy or not working hard enough? What kind of comfort is that? We all work hard and are busy and have been asked to give a lot to this election season and we are tired of radio fundraisers and just want to sit back a little bit. It doesn't feel like the time to be asked to do a lot of work.

So, we could find this passage to be exhausting, but instead I find Paul's challenge to live this way freeing, and I'll explain why.  
First of all, we were created to work.

Jacob read us a scripture earlier from Isaiah, about the simple beauties of the kingdom of God. It's a beautiful passage. In some sense, it has this feeling of the heavenly good, a vision of what we think of when we think of heaven, of no more crying or pain, the wolf lying with the lamb. This last weekend when I was at the youth "event" with a bunch of middle school boys, the speaker talked about the kingdom of God and one kid interrupted to clarify that Heaven definitely has lots of Cheetos.

But the kingdom of God we read about here is not some far off place where people are entertained and eat whatever they want and feel really good all the time: this kingdom of god that starts here and now is WORK, and having that work always do good. never get tired of doing what is good.

They will build houses and live in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

<sup>22</sup> They won't build for others to live in,  
nor plant for others to eat.

Like the days of a tree will be the days of my people;  
my chosen will make full use of their handiwork.

As it's saying here...we're created to create, created to work. But not just that, but to MAKE FULL USE OF OUR WORK. As in, stop wasting our time. Full use of their handiwork. It's not that we'll stop working: it's that every nanosecond of time we spend working will count. That the good we get done cannot be undone. No more time or energy or money will be wasted. We will work and serve and give to create something amazing together.

I'd suggest going home and reading all of 2 Thessalonians, I swear it will only take you 10 minutes. Almost the whole book is Paul's constant praise for his people, talking about how much he brags about them to others. I hope you know I brag about you to my friends too. But

he recognizes that the people he's most proud of, who do the most good, are sometimes the people who also get pulled in the most number of directions, can get most prone to having too many distractions, and can get overwhelmed and worn out. Talented people get invited to do a lot of things. So, Paul wants them to be smart. He wants them to work for what is good, not just work for the sake of being busy. He's not talking to the unemployed or the young, people not sure how to get the work they want to do today: he's talking to people who have all the capacity to do good but get distracted and waste time on things that don't matter. He uses the words idle and lazy and busybodies, people who are trying to control stuff outside of their business. Wasting time and talents. And this is such an easy habit to get into, right? I know it is for me. This week when I got tired I watched 6 episodes of once upon a time. That wasn't a productive use of my time.

This is the basis of what's been called the minimalist movement, have you heard of it? to own less, to have smaller houses, to walk more and drive less, do fewer things but do them well. It's meant to be a movement where one gets rid of the excess clutter, and as a result, takes more joy in life. Perhaps the challenge to focus harder or be more productive in life sounds like more work, just one more thing to do. But this could look less like adding, and more like minimizing. It's much more rewarding, to get rid of the stuff and money and tasks you don't need. Do you ever just ask yourself, why am I giving to this? Why am I walking towards this? What am I doing? Could I live without this? Does this give me joy? Haven't those questions always led somewhere better?

My pastor friends are notoriously busy people, Especially solo pastors. And one of my solo pastor friends from Northfield heeded the call from North Dakota to venture out with other clergy to standing rock last week. She wrote a blog post when she got back, and this is what she said:

The elders then blessed the 500 clergy that had gathered as we joined together in a walk to edge of the law enforcement line, a standoff at the bridge, running over the sacred waters.

As we walked, my friend and I were asked to walk in unity with a young Navajo woman and her friend. The Navajo women played a drum and sang. And we walked. In unity. At the invitation of these women.

This event was not about my song. It was not about the guilt of a church or a nation. It was about not about being a hero or a rescuer. It was about being together. It was about being physically present. It was about walking on the land. It was about witnessing the sacred beauty and power it contained. It was about literally saying, "We are with you."

I did not go because I am so great, or so brave, or a good neighbor... I went because I was invited. I went because Jesus said, 'Go.' I went because sometimes we are simply called to walk together.

Shauna recognized that the smartest way to walk was with intention, and never to walk alone. I'm here to challenge you today to walk together and to make full use of your handiwork. I invite you to keep doing good even when it's hard. I encourage you to give of yourself to this community. I give to this community because I believe that every dollar given to this church will build something bigger than us and will glorify God. I believe giving my time to this place gives back to me more than I give. I challenge you to put every dollar you own into something that you feel will give abundantly to help the world. I invite you to walk, and use every step you take not just to make your goals on your Fitbit but to move towards something that will give the world life, whether it's walking downtown in a protest or rolling in your wheelchair to say hi to a friend. I invite you to use every ounce of energy you have to take care of yourself and love God and love your neighbor, because it's cheesy and cliché to say but it really does take more energy to hate than to love. Conserve your energy. Use yourself well.

Maybe the reason you're at church today is to hear that everything will be okay: I do want to declare that everything is going to be okay. Everything will be okay, but not because we will sit back and watch while God makes the world better. When Paul wrote in first Corinthians he called us the body of Christ, and I believe he meant that quite literally. God moves in this world through our hands and feet. God is making everything okay by helping us choose to never tire of doing what is good, and to keep us working together.