

Trinity 9, 2018

Christian Boundaries

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

By Fr. Bill Baker

“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.”

Boundaries. I think we would all agree that boundaries are necessary to a productive life and the well being of society and cultural interactions. Without boundaries chaos would ensue. Disagreements on terms would lead to war, outlandish perspectives would inflict the innocent and immorality would encompass every whim. Boundaries are the lines drawn to ensure cooperation, prosperity and happiness. But when we look at the news of the day we see not boundaries but a wiping away of lines, like ocean waves destroying a lovers testimony written in the sand.

Today we read from St. Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. In the whole of this letter Paul writes of their love toward God and their eager participation in the Gospel of Christ. Upon hearing the Word of God they turned from worshipping idols to *“serve the living and true God.”* So how was Paul able to bring them into the Way, the Christian faith? Boundaries. Here is what Paul writes in the second chapter of our Epistle, *“But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts”* (1 Thess. 2:4). The boundaries for all of humanity are set by God Himself as he lays His will upon our hearts and in our minds. Within God's boundaries we are set free to fully encounter God's presence in our lives. For those who understand this is most encouraging because we live in world where Freewill allows us to step outside these boundaries creating unwanted and unwarranted turmoil. For now we must endure the trials of life and the secular erosion of the Christian faith. But! we do so in within the strength of Christian boundaries set forth in Holy Scripture.

“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.”

Today’s reading is a warning of love to those doing the Gospel right. You might think that boundaries are set to keep some out and retain others. To an extent you are correct. Christian boundaries have been established over two millennia to ward off false belief and heresy. But, the Christian perspective is not one that alienates but one that invites; inviting those who want the truth of everlasting life in Christ to enter in; to enter in to ‘charitas inveritas’ love in truth. Paul is admonishing those in Thessalonica to continue. He tells them it is their faith that keeps the church strong and moving forward, *“Therefore brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord”* (1 Thess. 3:7-8). Step outside the boundaries of the Christian faith and a distorted gospel appears and sprouts in men’s imaginations bringing many into the folds of deception.

“For God has not called us unto uncleanness”, Paul continues, “but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy spirit.”

I have never been able to bring myself to accept modern day interpretations nor modern day revelations that revise the early teachings of the church. The coming of Christ into the world was not just a hopeful venture by the Almighty ‘with fingers crossed’. God, being incarnate within the humanity of Jesus, came to uphold the boundaries of glory by giving himself to rectify man’s disobedience. It would be an act of God that would heal all wounds. And Jesus chose twelve counterparts to build that everlasting foundation...twelve men whom he would use to enforce the boundaries of the true Kingdom and establish His church; twelve men who would hold a special place in the expression of God’s love toward mankind. The Apostles were unique in that they were charged with recording the Ways and the Will of God not to be altered EVER by those who would come after: boundaries...not to be crossed.

Within the boundaries set by God in our Christian faith we must continue to live in a world that offends us just as our Christian faith

offends the worldly. As the church dwindles we are not called to judge nor are we called to conform. As members in the body of Christ we cannot only be concerned with St. Andrews. The Christian call is to reach out in truth to the fullness of Christian potential by exhibiting brotherly love to Believers and non-believers, traditionalists and contemporary expounders of the faith. In St. Chrysostom's writings he explains that "faithful Christian discipleship is a matter of active love in which the believer goes beyond a mere avoidance of evil" (Letters to the Fallen Theodore). Remember the adage, "share the Gospel and sometimes use words."

In the final verses of our reading Paul tells the Thessalonians (and I feel that he could be speaking directly to St. Andrews) *"as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia (within our own communities): but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you..."*

Boundaries. As hard as it may be...as tempting as the other side of that line in the sand may seem, we must endure in the faith and avoid contributing to the sinful actions that keep others from the glory of God's salvific gift in Christ. By remaining true, by staying the course, we will live in the fullness of life as examples, that others may come to accept our witness and find that the offer of salvation is for all who come and ask; *"That (we) may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that (we) may have lack of nothing."*

We have gathered here in this small family church to worship in the freedom given to us set by the boundaries of God...boundaries that encompass Godly love and everlasting life...boundaries expressed most beautifully in these words from Archbishop William Temple:

"Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose—all this

gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable." -- Archbishop William Temple

The innate call to life is strong in all God's creatures, but the call of the Christian is a call beyond the mortal confines of earthly life.

May you live peacefully within the freedom offered by the boundaries of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.