

Second Hand Preacher 10 15 17 and 10 22 17

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

(Note: Due to some scheduling conflicts, I'm going to blog about both this week's and next week's passages)

Endings and Beginnings

What I really like of St. Paul are his letters. We don't have the actual autograph, meaning what Paul actually wrote on, but we have ancient manuscripts that have been translated into many languages. These letters may have been written for specific communities, but they soon became more universal because their concepts could teach the masses. We are still learning from them today. The letter structure is common for the day and many of what we consider authentic Pauline letters typically share the same structure. Some letters that are attributed to Paul may not be him if they were written later because the structure varies. Scripture scholars work hard to give us knowledge about what St. Paul and other biblical writers wrote about and perhaps why they wrote the sacred scripture.

This week's second reading is from the closing words of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. This whole letter is very encouraging kind of like a big old thank you note. The Philippians helped Paul financially and were a big support to him both when he visited and during his time of imprisonment. Paul closes out this letter to his friends, who he will never see again.

We have been reading the highlights of this letter for a month now and there is much good news to glean from it. Paul preaches Christ resurrected and his relationship to God the Father. This is good news for the Philippians and for us as we are able to live with the recognition of God's promises in our lives. One of the lines of this chapter is very striking to me. Verse 4:13 reads; "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." I put this treasured verse on my ordination card. I saw it once on a sign at a gymnastics meet. I got to talk to the athlete and she told me that this verse really inspired her. I adopted it as my own and it gave me purpose to get through the hard parts of seminary. During some of my challenges over the last 20 years of my ministry this verse has been a gem to behold even in dark times.

Next we read the opening to the first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica. This is the first of two letters to this community. Paul greets them warmly, but he really uses them to instruct Christians who are struggling. He wants them to have endurance when facing any obstacles. Being a Christian in Thessalonica isn't easy and Paul is their spiritual father. He encourages them and wants them to grow in their faith.

There is much to learn from Paul and all he has experienced. I extend an invitation to you, gentle reader, to find out more about this amazing author. Much of our faith can be attributed to this man of God.