“Shaken Out of Our Wits”

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-5; 13-17

November 10, 2019

**2 Thess 2:1-5;13-17 – NRSV: The Man of Lawlessness**

2As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, 2not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. 3Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless oneis revealed, the one destined for destruction.  4He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. 5Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?

**Chosen for Salvation**

13 But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, 17comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

A few years ago, on a Friday night I was at a friend’s house in Ellijay enjoying a girl’s weekend with her and another mutual friend while my friend’s husband was out of town. The house is a quarter of a mile off the road and surrounded by beautiful hardwood-tree-filled Army Corps of Engineers’ land on three sides, adjacent to Carter’s Lake, and accessed by a gravel driveway. In the winter, when all the trees are bare, you can *sort of* see their closest neighbor’s house up on a hill to the right. My friend’s house is certainly accessible, but there is definitely a feeling of remoteness.

We were in the living room when we heard a noise. My brain interpreted the noise as one of their three cats jumping down, but my friend Lynne said, “I think someone is at the door.” Just as Sam, their largest cat, strolled into my peripheral vision to confirm my brain’s interpretation of the noise, we heard…BLAM…BLAM…BLAM…coming from the door on the side porch. With false bravado, the 3 of us went to the back door, and I asked, “Who’s there?”

**No** answer.

At that point, the three of us nervously looked at each other and Lynne’s *“if someone is trying to break in”* plan went into action!

I will spare you the details of **all** that occurred after that. The incident ended with 2 officers from the sheriff’s department coming to the house…but it was awhile before they arrived…checking around outside, and the officers paying a visit to a nearby house where they had observed a party occurring on their way to respond to our 911 call. At that house, they had talked with the parents because we had seen several boys walking up the gravel driveway after the sudden loud knocking, which, by the way, occurred twice.

To borrow a phrase from the scripture we just heard, the 3 of us were **“shaken and alarmed.”**

An even better way to describe our emotions that evening, is commentator F. F. Bruce’s translation of that phrase… Bruce contends the New Revised Standard translation of the phrase is tepid. Bruce believes a better translation of that phrase is:

“not to be shaken out of your wits.”

Trust me…the 3 of us were definitely shaken out of our wits that Friday night!

What was going on to cause the Thessalonian Christians to be *shaken out of their wits*?

Paul wrote the 2nd letter to the church in Thessalonica because they were concerned about the Parousia…the second coming of Christ or what they called *the day of the Lord.*

Initially, may of the earliest Christians expected Jesus to return with their lifetime.

In Paul’s 1st letter to the Thessalonian community, he had stressed the nearness of *the day of the Lord* to help keep their hope alive because of the hardships and persecutions they were facing.

As time passed after Christ’s resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven, some Christians, and particularly those in Thessalonica, were worried *the day of the Lord* had occurred and they had missed it.

Now, in the 2nd letter, the focus is reversed, and Paul is reminding them, that though it will occur, *the day of the Lord* has not yet occurred…they have not been left behind.

I suspect you good people of Pleasant Hill Presbyterian may have some concerns as you live through this season in the life of this church.I certainly don’t think you are *shaken out of your wits* as my 2 friends and I were on that Friday evening… nor are you scared out of your wits because you think Jesus has returned and you’ve been left behind as some in the Thessalonica church did. But you do have your concerns.

As you well know, this church is in what is called the interim time…a time of transition.

Some of you have never experienced this time in the life of a church…

either due to this being the only church of which you’ve been a member, or your previous church tradition didn’t search for pastors the way Presbyterians do.

If your previous Christian church tradition was Methodist, for example, you were accustomed to your pastor saying goodbye one Sunday and your new pastor saying hello the next.

It has been two years this month since Dave Frye, the founding pastor and pastor of this church for over 30 years, retired. You hired an interim pastor, Joel Alvis, who was with you for a year and then received a call to serve as the Executive Presbyter of a neighboring Presbytery. You hoped that within 6 months of Joel’s departure, the PNC…

which began its work in February of 2019… would find that person God desires as your next installed pastor.

Jody has served wonderfully over those 6 months as Acting Head of Staff and Moderator, yet…still no new pastor. Now, I am here as your Bridge Interim Pastor to continue Joel’s good work of serving during this time of transition in the life of PHPC and to allow Jody to return fully to those things you called her here to do.

Of course, there have been other changes during these last two years…changes which may or may not have been easy for or welcomed by some of you. Add to these that Thanksgiving is 2 weeks from this coming Thursday, the Sunday after Thanksgiving is the first Sunday of Advent, and Christmas is only 26 days after Thanksgiving this year…

while you may not be scared out of your wits, it’s certainly understandable you may be experiencing some angst and asking questions.

You expected to have an installed pastor in place by this time, to be celebrating the first Advent and Christmas with that new pastor, and to be moving along into the next season of this church’s life with your new pastor.

I’ve only been here for 10 days, but I already have some observations to share with you.

You have an excellent and dedicated staff who care deeply about this church and her ministry and who care deeply about each of you. Each of them also has been affected by this time of transition, with some doing more than the usual, and at the least, having 3 different heads of staff in the span of 2 years. That’s a lot of adjustment. If you have not told them thank you lately, this season of Thanksgiving is certainly an appropriate time to do so.

When I was preparing for the interview with the Bridge Interim Pastor Nominating Committee, I looked at your website and this church’s statistics on our denomination’s website. I was impressed at your level of commitment to mission, to going beyond the walls of these buildings to support and encourage those in this community and beyond for whom life has been difficult, financially and otherwise.

A group has just returned from a mission trip to Blue Ridge and just this past Friday, a member dropped off supplies for your Laundry Love ministry and for the Thanksgiving sandwich ministry. These are just two examples that are indicative of this church’s commitment to those for whom life is harder than many of us will ever experience.

This church is in an enviable position from that of many other churches. You have no debt. Through your recent Capital Campaign, this church’s debt was paid off. Yes, your income has decreased over the past few years…that is something you share with many other churches…but thanks be to God you don’t have the concern of making mortgage payments while income is decreasing…now that would be a huge challenge!

Yes, you have seen attendance at worship services decrease over the past few years.

I know there is no comfort in knowing most churches are experiencing this reality.

Gone are the Sundays when *going to church* was what people did.It’s not that people are less “Christian.” There are just so many other things pulling at them whether it’s sports or Sunday morning being the only opportunity for the family to have breakfast together or having a lake or mountain cabin to escape to on the weekend. We can wring our hands and wish for the way *it used to be* or we can face reality and discover different ways to be the church.

You miss those people who formerly sat next to you or in front or behind you during worship. Rather than wondering where they are or why they aren’t here anymore, pick up the phone instead and call them…or if a call is too much out of your comfort zone, write them a note.

A simple, “I’ve missed seeing you at PHPC…I hope you’re well…Is there anything I or PHPC can do to be of help?” might be just what the person needs.

Imagine if each one of you were to call or write one person you’ve missed seeing here.

We might see them on other days besides Christmas Eve and Easter! Even more importantly, whether they wish to continue to be a part of this church family or not, they will know that someone at Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church cares about them.

I met with your Pastor Nominating Committee this past Monday night. They are a good group of people who have answered God’s call, and your call as a congregation, to do the hard work of searching for that person who will be your next pastor. They have been at work since February 2018 and even more than you, they want to get that work accomplished. They have experienced frustrations and challenges in the search process, but they are still faithfully working, meeting every Monday night, to do the work they’ve been called to do.

They have been accompanied and encouraged along this journey by folks from the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. I trust they have been lifted by you in your prayers.

It is hard to be patient, for them and for you. As one who has worked with pastor search committees before on behalf of the presbytery and as an interim pastor, I know that you want the PNC to take the time it needs to find the person God wants to be your next pastor. Your prayers and your patience will help that happen.

Due to all these items I have just mentioned, and many more I know I will discover in the days ahead, there is no reason for this church to be *scared out of its wits* or even anything close to it.

In the second portion of today’s scripture from 2 Thessalonians, Paul gives thanks for the brothers and sisters in the church there, reminds them they have been chosen by God, and to stand firm and hold fast.

Today I thank God for this church, Pleasant Hill Presbyterian, and I thank God for each of you, chosen by God and washed in the waters of baptism, as you stand firm and hold fast during this season of transition.

May God our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter, who loves you and through grace has given you eternal comfort and good hope, continue to comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

And may all God’s people say, “Amen.”