

SUNDAY 5 November 2023

Hymn 132 - THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY

**There's a wideness
in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea,
and forgiveness in his justice
sealed for us on Calvary.**

**There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.**

**For the love of God is broader
than the measures of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.**

**But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own,
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.**

**If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the goodness of our Lord. [end]**

Greeting

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. **And also with you.**

Sentence of the day

May God strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

Jesus said: 'This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Creator God, you have filled the world with beauty: open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works, that rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness, for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Ministry of the Word

Joshua 3:7-17

7 And the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. 8 Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.' "

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. 10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. 12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

14 So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his loving mercy is forever.

2 Let the Lord's redeemed say so: whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,

3 And gathered in from every land, from the east and from the west: from the north and from the south.

4 Some went astray in the wilderness and in the desert: and found no path to an inhabited city.

5 They were hungry and thirsty: and their heart fainted within them.

6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their distress: and he took them out of their trouble.

7 He led them by the right path: till they came to an inhabited city.

33 He turned rivers into desert: And springs of water into thirsty ground.

34 He makes a fruitful land a salty waste: because its inhabitants are evil.

35 He turned the wilderness into a pool of water: and parched ground into flowing springs.

36 And there he settles the hungry: and they build a city to live in.

37 They sow fields and plant vineyards: Which give them a fruitful harvest.

38 He blesses them, and they multiply greatly: he does not let their cattle diminish.

39 But he pours contempt on princes: And makes the stray in the pathless desert.

1 Thessalonians 3:5-13

5 For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. 6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.

7 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Matthew 23:1-12.37-39

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. 8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 3

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

Let us pray for the world and the church.

Response: God of grace, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer

Accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Sentences of Scripture

Whenever you stand praying forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven will forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11.25

Prayer of Approach

We do not presume to come to your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The Confession

God is steadfast in love and infinite in mercy, welcoming sinners and inviting them to the Lord's table. Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, confident in God's forgiveness.

Merciful God, our maker and our judge, we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have failed to do: we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves; we repent, and are sorry for all our sins. Father, forgive us.

Strengthen us to love and obey you in newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God, who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith: pardon you and set you free from all your sins, strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Greeting of Peace

We are the body of Christ. **His Spirit is with us.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn 121 - The Servant King

From heav'n You came, helpless babe

Enter'd our world, Your glory veil'd

Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

Chorus

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load He chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
Yet not my will but Yours He said
Chorus

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails, Surrendered
Chorus

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other's needs to prefer
For it is Christ we're serving
Chorus

Offering

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.
Accept and use our offerings for your glory and for the service of your kingdom.
Blessed be God for ever.

The Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give our thanks and praise.

All thanks and praise, glory and honour, be yours at all times, in every place, holy and loving Father,
true and living God.

We praise you that through your eternal Word you brought the universe into being and made us in
your own image. You have given us this earth to care for and delight in, and with its bounty you
preserve our life.

We thank you that you bound yourself to the human race with the promises of a gracious covenant
and called us to serve you in love and peace.

Above all, we give you thanks for your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ: born as one of us, he lived our
common life and offered his life to you in perfect obedience and trust. By his death he delivered us
from sin, brought us new life, and reconciled us to you and to one another.

Therefore with angels and archangels, with apostles, and prophets, with holy men and women of every age, we proclaim your great and glorious name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy God, we thank you for these gifts of your creation, this bread and wine, and we pray that we who eat and drink them in obedience to our Saviour Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may be partakers of his body and blood, and be made one with him and with each other in peace and love.

On the night he was betrayed Jesus took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take, eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory. Therefore we do as our Saviour has commanded: proclaiming his offering of himself made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, and looking for his coming again, we celebrate, with this bread and this cup, his one perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

As we eat and drink this holy sacrament, renew us by your Spirit that we may be united in the body of your Son and serve you as a royal priesthood in the joy of your eternal kingdom.

Receive our praises, Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom and in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we worship you in songs of never-ending praise:--

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

**We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.
The gifts of God for the people of God.**

Come let us take this holy sacrament of the body and blood of Christ in remembrance that he died for us, and feed on him in our hearts with thanksgiving.

The Lord's Supper is open to all who love the Lord.
Grape juice is available. Please come to the table maintaining social distancing

Living God, in this holy meal you fill us with new hope. May the power of your love, which we have known in word and sacrament, continue your saving work among us, give us courage for our pilgrimage, and bring us to the joys you promise.

Father, we offer ourselves to you as a living sacrifice through Jesus Christ our Lord. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.

Hymn 125 Guide me O thou Great Redeemer

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore, feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow:
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield, be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee,

Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord: **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Sermon 1 Thessalonians 3

What sort of movies do you like? Are you like me (or at least what I admit to in public) and like action or science fiction movies? Or are you a rom com, romantic comedy, sort of person?

While I was working in the public service, the only opportunities I usually got to watch movies were on flights when I traveled for work and the selection is usually pretty limited, so I have on occasion sat through a romantic comedy, purely for lack of any good action films of course.

From this limited experience, it seems that the basic plot line of every rom com involves love triumphing over a set of apparently insurmountable obstacles before the film reaches the inevitable happy ending.

Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians 3 is definitely not a rom com, it does share some parallels. While it may not be about romantic love reaching a happy ending, it is certainly about love overcoming obstacles.

Paul starts my saying that **out of his intense longing they made every effort to see the Thessalonians.**

We know Paul established the church in Thessalonica, but was soon run out of town and chased all the way to Berea by Jews who didn't like Paul's teaching. He calls this separation being orphaned. Other translations say torn away, but the Greek is literally orphaned, like losing his parents. It certainly indicates the strong feelings, the familial love, that Paul has for the church in Thessalonica.

This is even more striking when you realise that by the time Paul wrote this letter, he hadn't actually been apart from the Thessalonians for all that long. We know he left Thessalonica for Berea, and after some Thessalonian Jews started harassing him in Berea, he went to Athens, where he wrote 1 Thessalonians. We don't know how long he spent in Berea and Athens, but I don't imagine it would have been more than a year or so at most. Yet even in this short time, Paul desperately missed the Church in Thessalonica.

He also says that even though he was separated by physical distance, that the Thessalonians were never out of his thoughts. This reminds me of the challenges we had with the social distancing requirements of COVID-19. I spoke to many people who struggled because they couldn't visit family members because of COVID-19. How much harder must it have been for Paul who didn't have the communication technology we have today? He couldn't just pick up a phone and speak to his friends. He couldn't quickly send an email or a text. No, the best Paul could do was write a letter and give it to one of his friends to take to Thessalonica - and just hope that it got there. We might complain about Australia Post being unreliable, but in the first century you were never sure that your friend would get to their destination, let alone any letters you might have sent with them.

Nevertheless, that's what Paul did. **He sent Timothy, who he calls their brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith,**

Paul had sent his young colleague Timothy as his representative to Thessalonica **to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians in their faith.** Since Paul couldn't go, he wanted Timothy to find out about their faith and report back to him. He was afraid that in some way the tempter, that is the devil, or Satan, had tempted them away from their faith and that the efforts of Paul's team may have been wasted.

Do you ever check in with people that have moved away from Cooma, or even just stopped coming here? Have you made contact and checked whether they have found a new church? I know it is disappointing when someone leaves, even when it is because they have moved to a new job or because of changed life or family circumstances, but shouldn't we be vastly more disappointed if they have fallen out of Christian fellowship completely? Yet how often do we even ask?

Well, Paul specifically **sent Timothy to find out about their faith.** I suspect that even though Paul hadn't been with the Thessalonian Christians for that long, he at least thought he had good reason to be concerned about their keeping the faith. Even so, and with the likelihood (and perhaps expectation) that he would hear bad news, and that even asking the question might embarrass

the Thessalonians or at least make them uncomfortable, he still asks Timothy to ask the question. And off Timothy went.

Can you imagine the thoughts that were going through Paul's head while he was waiting for Timothy to return. Was the fledging church still going? Were its members still strong in the faith? Had they become discouraged in the face of news of Paul's persecution or perhaps given up the meeting together in the face of persecution of their own? Had they been subverted by false teachers, perhaps remaining a church in name only, but no longer believing the one true gospel? Or had the Holy Spirit sustained them and their faith? What would he hear?

Finally, the news he was waiting for came. Timothy returned, and he **brought good news about their faith and their love.**

He told Paul that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us.

Wow - what a relief! I can just imagine Paul's whoops of joy as he hears the message he has been longing to hear!

Listen again to Paul's letter: in all our distress and persecution **we were encouraged about you because of your faith.** 8 For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 9 How can **we thank God enough** for you in return for **all the joy we have** in the presence of our God because of you?

What love Paul has for the Thessalonians! This genuinely sounds like Paul is that proud father, beaming over his child's effort in a school play. As much as I love this congregation, I'm sure the joy I draw from your faith doesn't compare with Paul's joy at that news from the Thessalonians.

Of course, for Paul, it isn't just an emotional response. Every night and day **he prays most earnestly** that he may see them again and supply what is lacking in their faith.

Again we are reminded of the things we can and should be doing for those we can't physically meet with. I'm sure you are praying for your family members - praying for them, and praying that you may see them again soon. I'm sure you are all praying that you can actually spend time in the same room as family members, without a phone line or computer screens between.

And so, I started this sermon talking about the obstacles that stand in the way of true love in romantic comedies. In Paul's missionary journeys, Satan set impassable obstacles between Paul and the Thessalonians, just as we have all experienced the obstacles to our normal relationships brought about by COVID-19. The obstacles are so concerning, so troubling, because they stand in the way of relationships that are so important. They stood between Paul's relationship to the church he started, as well as our relationships with our family and friends.

You may have noticed that Relationships are a theme I constantly come back to in my sermons, because they are so important: so important to God, the Trinity, who is in very nature love. So important to Christians, whose relationship with God has been restored through Jesus's death and resurrection, and whose relationship with others is so central to our faith.

And meeting, spending time in close proximity with each other is fundamental to relationships. Whether it is God walking in the garden with Adam and Eve, God meeting with Abraham at the not-burning up bush at Horeb, or Jesus meeting with Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus had died, or us, as we struggle to meet together with our families and our sisters and brothers in Christ.

As Paul did when he was obstructed from meeting with the Thessalonians, so during the period we couldn't meet together did we seek to get word of each other, and pray for each other, and find ways to encourage each other in our faith, and ultimately, we also just longed to see each other.

In conclusion, it is not only in rom-coms that love overcomes all obstacles. Our Father in heaven found a way for Paul to get news of the faith of the Thessalonians from Timothy, and he has found a way for us to meet together via

technology, and has allowed us to meet together at this time. Even though Paul was probably never able to physically meet with the church in Thessalonica in this world, our gospel reading reminded us that God's love does indeed overcome all obstacles, and everyone in Christ will meet again when we are raised to eternal life when Christ returns on the last day.

Until then, let us pray, as Paul did in verses 11 and 12: Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus **clear the way for us to come to you.** 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen