# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Faith, Love, and Hope”**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-3**

 **January 9, 2022**

Today we begin a series of messages on the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, a letter that teaches us much about what God desires for his church. Putting the things for which Paul commends the Thessalonians together with the things that he hopes and prays for them to do and understand, we get a wonderful picture of what a healthy, vibrant church can be.

Before I read the opening words of the letter, I’d like us to take a look at what led up to Paul writing it. The book of Acts tells us the story of the founding of the Thessalonian church. Paul and his missionary partner Silas had embarked on what we call Paul’s second missionary journey. Young Timothy joined them, and together with other fellow missionaries, they revisited the churches founded on the first missionary journey in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Then God gave Paul and his friends a special calling to move deeper into the Roman Empire, and they crossed the Aegean Sea into the area of Macedonia (modern-day northern Greece). They ministered in the city of Philippi, and then they moved on to Thessalonica. Acts 17:1-9 tells the story of their ministry in that city. For three weeks, Paul and his team shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and many Jews as well as Greeks believed and converted to Christianity. But, there were Jews in the city that rejected the message and, becoming jealous of Paul’s success, they formed a mob and attacked the house where they believed Paul to be staying. Not finding him, they dragged the owner of the house and some of the other new believers before the city authorities.

In the meantime, Paul and the others moved on to Berea. When the Thessalonian Jews heard that, they came down to Berea and started another riot, forcing the missionaries to move on. They went first to Athens and eventually made their way to Corinth.

While all this turmoil was going on, Paul never forgot the new believers in Thessalonica. As we read in the second and third chapter of the letter, passages you will encounter this coming week if you are following our Daily Bible Reading Plan, Paul tells them that his concern for them was so great that he sent Timothy back to them from Athens to find out how they were doing. Paul’s fear was that due to opposition and persecution from that group of very aggressive Jews who opposed the message, they had given up on the faith. Timothy eventually returns to Paul in Corinth and reports that the Christians in Thessalonica are standing strong in their faith, that they are practicing Christian love, and that their hope is in the return of Christ. It is in light of that wonderful report from Timothy that Paul writes the letter named First Thessalonians. I invite you to join me as I read the first three verses

This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God give you grace and peace. We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The trio of “faith,” “hope,” and “love” used here show up in many other places in the Bible. For example, Paul ends his great passage in 1 Corinthians 13 on the nature of love by saying that these three last forever, for they are a trio of words that describe the character of the inner Christian life and impact the way we live outwardly.

Inwardly the Thessalonians trust God – they have faith – which leads to the outward expression of faithful work. Faith that is real, that is more than mere intellectual agreement with words about Jesus but placing one’s life in his hands, has a practical day-in, day-out effect on the kind of person you are. You no longer put your trust in other things, such as money or reputation or security or achievements, or in a false religion that excuses your sin. You no longer work for these things, seeking to make them a personal reality, but you live for God and your work, your faithful work, is on his behalf.

Inwardly they know they are loved by God, and this leads to the outward expression of loving deeds. Consistent, constant, committed love for others, because God consistently, constantly, and committedly loves them. Not love that occasionally does a small good deed, an inexpensive effort on behalf of another, but a love that expresses itself even when it hurts, even when it is not reciprocated.

And, thirdly, they have an inward hope that the Lord Jesus Christ will return one day and that he will make all things new and set right every wrong they are experiencing. This allows them to outwardly accept suffering for their faith, knowing that it is neither permanent nor that it is going unnoticed by God. They are actively engaged in their world, serving God with all their heart, and doing so through an enduring hope that Christ will come as their eternal deliverer.

Faithful work, loving deeds, and enduring hope. What a wonderful description of a group of people who make up a spiritually healthy church that has a vital connection to the living God. These were people who loved Jesus, and that gave them comfort in the midst of their troubles, a sense of purpose to live out in their daily lives, and hope for their future. As it was for them, may it be for us here at Congregational-Presbyterian Church, and may we be a family of faith that makes a difference for the Lord.