# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Paul’s Prayer”**

**1 Thessalonians 3:9-13**

 **January 16, 2022**

Last Sunday we began our series of messages on the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. We spoke of Paul’s commendation of the believers for their work of faith, their labor of love, and their enduring hope. We also learned that after Paul and his fellow missionaries were forced to leave Thessalonica by those opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they travelled to several other towns with the message. But, as they traveled, Paul grew increasingly concerned about the new Thessalonian Christians, afraid that the opposition they were experiencing would cause them to turn away from their faith. So, being unable to go to them himself, he sent Timothy, one of his co-missionaries, back to Thessalonica to find out how they were doing. Timothy eventually returned to Paul and gave him the good news about their faith and love, news which brought Paul great joy and encouragement in the midst of his present struggles and suffering. Those Paul had sought to comfort in the faith became themselves comforters of Paul. It is at this point in his letter that Paul describes the prayer he has been praying for the believers in Thessalonica. I invite you to turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God’s presence. Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith. May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon. And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.

Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, an international Christian organization bringing relief to millions living in third world countries, had a plate on his desk that read: “Only people are forever.” I know that Paul would whole-heartedly agree. What counts ultimately in this world are not our possessions, or our accomplishments, or our recognition, but the people we’ve been given to know and love. Paul believed that God had given him people in Thessalonica who had joined him in the family of God, and it gave him great joy to hear they were doing well. But, while he was glad to be able to write them this letter, there was nothing that he wanted more than to see them. In verse 10 of his prayer he asks God to let him see them again, and in verse 11 he prays that God bring him to them very soon.

Paul was kept from being those he loved and cared for in Thessalonica, and he felt their absence keenly. Now, here I am in an empty Sanctuary preaching to a camera, and I feel your absence just as keenly.

These past two years in our church family, COVID has kept many of us apart. I know you feel deeply the loss of fellowship and relationship, as do I, as many of us have seen each other only sporadically or not at all. That is why I am encouraged by Paul’s response to being absent from his friends which is to pray and ask God to bring them back together. Paul prayed earnestly for them. Not a simple bedtime prayer: “O Lord, bless my friends in Thessalonica,” but thoughtful and sincere prayers for them by name. Paul prayed regularly for them. “Night and day we pray for you,” he says, indicating that they were frequently on his mind. And he prayed specifically that he would be able to see them again.

One of the things that really blessed me about our Christmas Eve services last month was seeing people in our church family I hadn’t seen in a long time. Not just that they were in church, but that we were in church together, sharing a smile and a hug and the words: “I have missed you, my friend.” We have a men’s Bible study group that meets on Wednesday mornings. One of the guys was diagnosed last fall with a potentially fatal disease, and for many months he was absent from our group. Then just last week he returned for the first time. We had been praying for him, calling and emailing him, and hearing about how he was doing. Every Wednesday his name was in our minds and in our prayers. But, when he walked in through the door of Fellowship Hall, the group broke into spontaneous applause as we expressed how glad we were to see him back and in good health.

Only people are forever, and it hurts when we can’t be with those who are important to us, including those in our church family. Let us pray earnestly and regularly for one another, and let us pray, like Paul did, asking God to bring us all back together again soon.