

Stand Firm and Hold Fast

Communion/All Saints' Sunday

November 2, 2025 (0)

2nd Thessalonians 1:1-4 and 11-12

¹ From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God our Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. ² Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Brothers and sisters, we must always thank God for you. This is only right because your faithfulness is growing by leaps and bounds, and the love that all of you have for each other is increasing. ⁴ That's why we ourselves are bragging about you in God's churches. We tell about your endurance and faithfulness in all the harassments and trouble that you have put up with... ¹¹ We are constantly praying for you for this: that our God will make you worthy of his calling and accomplish every good desire and faithful work by his power. ¹² Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored by you, and you will be honored by him, consistent with the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

STAND FIRM & HOLD FAST

Today, as we have remembered the saints who have gone on to glory in this past year, we celebrate this community of faith and those who have walked with us as faithful witnesses to Christ's

love, grace, mercy, and peace. It is good to remember and to celebrate these saints. Today is also a day when we look beyond these walls and beyond the personal connections that have guided and developed our faith. Using Paul's words from Thessalonians on this All Saints' Day we are reminded that we are bound up in a larger community of faith – in one that is made up of people who look and sound and gather like us and of those who do not look or sound or gather like we do. Today we celebrate the universal body of Christ, and we celebrate those who have contributed to our faith even though we have never met them. As we do so, let us begin with a word of prayer.

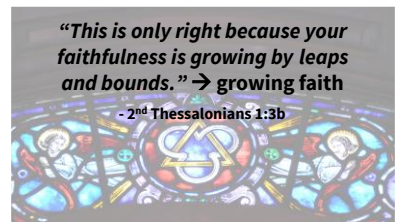
God of infinite love, we are poor in Spirit, but your realm of love is ours. Make us holy in the opening of our hearts to your grace. In this spirit, I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts are acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today, as we focus on the saints past and present, we acknowledge that we are drawn to them, to those who seem saintly. In every church that I have been a part of, there have been and there are people who you know are prayer warriors or humble servants or generous givers who seem to always be there to pray, to serve, to offer their resources when something is needed. In the New Testament, a saint is not someone who is flawless or is a super believer or doer. In the New Testament witness, a saint is someone who claims Christ as Lord and Savior and then seeks to follow Jesus according to the graces that they have been given.

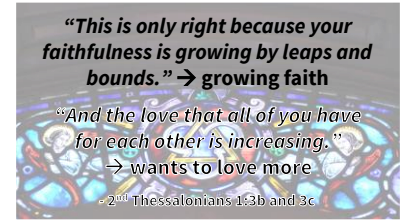
Those graces are the gifts and the blessings that we have been given. To some, the gift is music. To others the gift is teaching. To some the blessing is serving. To others the blessing is the ability to mentor or to encourage. To some the gift an ability to comfort. To others the gift is the presence of peace in the storm. To some the blessing is time. To others the blessing is an abundance of resources. Yes, we have all been gifted by the Holy Spirit. We all have been blessed by the Lord our God. From this perspective, all who belong to a community of faith, all who desire to belong to a community of faith, all who claim faith in Jesus, all who struggle and fail, all who struggle and succeed, all of us, are saints. The saints are those who worship with us – in person or online. The saints are those who are in our small groups and who serve on our teams. The saints are those who sing the hymns and songs, who hear the words and pray the prayers with us week by week. Yes, the saints are all around us. My friends, the saints are us.

Some of you, me included, might be wondering how we qualify as a saint. And maybe some of you, again like myself, might want to know how we might be recognized as a saint by others. Turning to 2nd Thessalonians 1, our passage for today, we find an answer according to Paul. In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers a list of saintly activities. In these words of assurance, Paul affirms their faith while calling us to live out this kind of faith too. You see, the people in these churches, in many ways, were just like us. They had sent a letter back to Paul expressing their doubts and fears. They worried that they were not going to make it, that they did not have what it took to be faithful, that they would not pass the tests sure to come up against their young faith.

After the greeting and the offering of God's grace and peace found in verses 1 and 2, Paul gives thanks for the people who make up the churches in Thessalonica. In the second half of verse 3 Paul gives two reasons why he is thankful. First, Paul notes that this thanks *"is only right because your faithfulness is growing by leaps and bounds."* This is the first mark of a saint: growing faith. So, we must ask: How does our faith grow? It grows the same way that it grew in the folks that made up the churches in Thessalonica: through study and exercise. They spent time studying the scriptures, in worship and in small groups. They asked questions about their faith, and they spent time reflecting on their walks of faith, in community and in private. Through these practices they breathed new life into their faith, growing closer to God and to one another. The faith that began as a hypothesis was becoming a certainty for those in these earliest churches. The thrill of first being "on fire" for Christ was growing into a steady and sure flame, one that guided their decisions and lit their way through the darkness. A growing faith will do the same things for us.

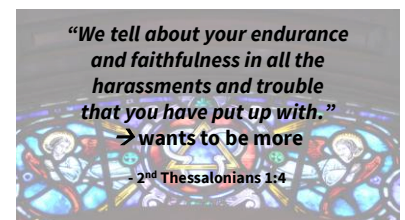


Continuing into the last part of verse 3, we read, *“And the love that all of you have for each other is increasing.”* This is the second mark of a saint: A saint wants to love more. For those in the church in Thessalonica, they were living out their faith in real, observable ways. They cared well for one another. They invited others into the community of faith. They were tending to, healing, comforting, and lifting one another up. The ways of love and service that were once a duty laid upon them by their faith was becoming something that brought them great joy. Selflessness and joy began to walk hand in hand. Walking this way, love was truly being lived out in their lives, in their church, and in their community.



Just think what would happen if everyone who visited our church came away convinced that we truly loved one another, not just tolerated one another or simply occupied the same spaces for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning but really loved one another. And just think what would happen if everyone who walked in the doors on a Sunday morning felt like they were invited to become a part of this fellowship of believers, invited to be truly welcomed and genuinely loved. Wouldn't that be transforming? We, as a church and as individuals, must always be striving to find new ways to connect to others, to love others, to invite and welcome others in, and to make positive differences in one another's lives. Simply put, we must always be people who want to love more.

Turning to verse 4 we find the third mark of a saint. Here Paul is talking up the church. We read, *“We tell about your endurance and faithfulness in all the harassments and trouble that you have put up with.”* He is lifting up their steadfastness and their faith in hard times. A saint is one who wants to be more.



Paul is commending them for staying true to Christ even when it was not easy. When made fun of and ridiculed, when persecuted and abused, when cast out of family or friend groups, the community of faith held true to their belief in Christ. The people in the churches in Thessalonica have endured harassment and trouble, remaining faithful to Christ.

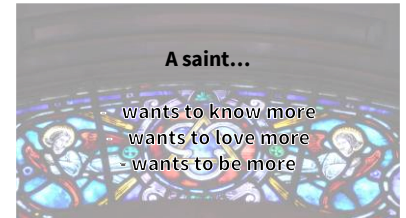
To endure... the word that Paul used originally was *hupomone*. This word is often translated 'endurance' but has more depth or more nuance to it. Today many associate endurance with bearing up under whatever negative thing that has beset us. In Paul's day there was much more to it than that. *Hupomone* describes a spirit that not only endures the trying circumstances but also seeks to master them. This spirit accepts the blows that life throws their way and then transforms them into stepping stones that lead to growth in their faith.

Living in our day and age, we really do not have to face the same kind of harassment and trouble and abuse and persecution that the early church of Christ faced. But we can choose to fly under the radar, to keep our faith mostly private, to avoid times when maybe we should act or speak out. We can shy away from Paul's call to "be more," to be more like Christ. But if we are living a faith that is growing and seeking to love more, it is hard to shy away.

There will be moments when we are called to step up for our faith. Maybe that is to speak up on behalf of a friend or neighbor who is experiencing an injustice. Maybe that is to step up and to provide some food or to pay someone's back rent or past due utility bill. Maybe that is to find the courage to do faithful things even when they might cost you in some way. Yes, we God will provide opportunities for us to demonstrate our faith and our endurance.

The mark of a saint is one who steps into these opportunities to be more and to do more for Christ. Paul addressed this call to a growing, doing faith in his first letter to the Thessalonians. In the first letter Paul reminded them that God had called them to conduct themselves in ways that God would consider worthy.

Jumping to verse 11, Paul acknowledges that this call to know more, to love more, and to be more is not easy. These are hard marks to always hit. Paul knew as much. That is why he prays in verse 11, *“that our God will make you worthy of his calling and accomplish every good desire and faithful work by his power.”* Paul reminds the churches in Thessalonica, and he reminds us today that we are still works in progress. That’s why he prays that God “will make” us worthy and will help us to accomplish the work that God places before us. God is ever at work in the life of a saint. Therefore, we are never finished products. A saint always has room to know more, to love more, and to be more.



In verse 12 Paul reminds the churches in Thessalonica, and he reminds us, why it matters – why it matters to live worthy of our calling as Christians, why it matters to be believers who always seek to know more, to love more, and to be more. First, when we live this way, honor is brought to Jesus. Christ will be glorified when his followers are people who emulate his example and live as he lived, who love as he loved, who serve as he served. Second, the glory of Christ will reside in those who have endured and remained faithful. With this glory within, we will shine like lights in the darkness of our world. As a teacher’s glory resides in the scholars that he or she produces, so does the master’s glory reside in those who are his disciples. And third, we will one day be honored with Christ in eternity. Having lived a life of faith, one day the saints will stand in the glorious presence of Jesus Christ.

To put some flesh to this idea of living a life worthy of our calling as disciples of Christ, I turn back to February of this year, when I invited the leadership team to read and reflect with me on this book, *What If Jesus Was Serious?* As our nation was becoming increasingly divided in red and blue with little or no middle ground, I sought to focus our church on being what is known as center set church. As we prepared to start reading and discussing this book that uses the Sermon on the Mount as its guiding scripture, I shared a vision for a church that was not red or blue, but purple. "Purple" is an old Youth Group term, as in, boys are red and girls are blue; blue and red make purple – no purpling at youth group, on mission trips, etc.

I was not conveying (at least I hope I was not) the idea that we as a church should be non-political or a-political. A center set church first focuses on Jesus as our way of life, as our guide in this world, as our direction and purpose. If you want to really delve into what this means, please read the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 6-8. A church focused on Jesus lives as a visible witness to the love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and humble service that Jesus embodied and modeled.

Jesus was not what we might today call "politically active." But he certainly had a social awareness that at times led him to address injustices or wrongs committed by the worldly leaders of his time. In his day this included the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman authorities. Most of this focus was aimed at the religious leaders who also functioned as political leaders of Israel at that time. While this is no longer the case, as Jesus modeled, at times we must address injustices and wrongs done by the church, whether that is this local church or whether it is a denomination or a movement. In the same way we must address injustices and wrongs done by our worldly leaders.

For some, that might mean running for a political office so that a Jesus-centered voice can be heard at that level, in those spaces. Here I again remind us that intent matters. If one enters the political realm to address the injustices and wrongs that Jesus would surely address if he were here today, then that is awesome. But for most of us, we are not called to run for office so that we can transform our world in this way. We are called to a simpler yet very difficult role that also has the power to transform our world. We are called to daily live out the love, grace, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and humble service that Jesus daily lived out. Living a life of faith that works at this calling will lead us to be people who want to know more, who want to love more, and who want to be more.

Today, on All Saints' Day, we have recognized some who have sought to know more, to love more, and to be more. There are many others that we can name in our hearts as saints as we look back over our journeys of faith. For those that have gone on, we celebrate the gifts of faith that each person was to our church or to our lives. But we also recognize that there are many here today, seeking to know more, to love more, and to be more. If we strive to stand firm and to hold fast to our faith in Christ Jesus, then righteousness and blessing will abound in our lives, in our church, and in our world. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As people of faith, we are called to always seek to know more, to love more, and to be more. Which area needs some attention in your faith this week? Focus in!

- 2) *Pray*. Why do you think it is important to focus on being a church with Jesus at our center? Please pray this week for our church to better live into this focus.
- 3) *Study*. Read 2nd Thessalonians 2:13-17, a prayer of thanks for the church' faith. What parts of the good news do you need to stand firm upon and to hold fast to this week?