

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Sunday, October 22, 2017

Sure Election

1. I have been talking a lot lately about bearing fruit of the kingdom and being conformed to the image of Christ. Bearing good fruit is essential to the Christian life. We should always be growing, learning, moving forward. Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians gives us two great reasons why bearing good fruit is essential, and shows the practical impact of it.
2. First, the Apostle Paul says that he, Silvanus, and Timothy give thanks to God because their election- God's sovereign work of setting them aside for himself, is obvious to Paul and his companions.
 - a. "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you..." (v. 4)
 - b. Paul doesn't rejoice because they chose God, but rather, that God chose them; and even more so, because God made it clear to Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy that God had chosen them in Christ, or, to use a theological term, that they are of the elect.
3. There are two reasons Paul expresses joy and certainty (for we *know*...) in the election of the Thessalonians.
 - a. First, he says that he and his companions brought the gospel in power and the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. He knows that the true gospel was preached, so the commitment that he sees among the Thessalonian Christians, he knows, is based on an accurate preaching of the gospel, accompanied by the Holy Spirit who applies the gospel to our hearts.
 - b. Since he knows that they have heard the true gospel, he knows that the second reason is sound- that they have received the teaching, turning from false idols, and have become imitators of him and of the Lord. In other words, Paul saw real change in them. He saw a response to the preaching of the true gospel that reflects a people who have truly understood and received that gospel.
 - c. Part of that response is that they received the Holy Spirit with joy through affliction. They were persecuted for their new-found faith; but they maintained a joy through it because they were overflowing with the Holy Spirit.
4. Our first reason, then, why bearing fruit is essential is because it offers a confirmation of election. When the true gospel is preached with power and the Holy Spirit, and when it is received joyfully by people who bear fruit, endure hardship for their commitment, and exhibit the joy of the Lord even in the midst of that hardship, it becomes evident that these are real Christians who have had the gospel confirmed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. As the saying goes: you will know a tree by its fruit.

Rejoicing of others

1. This all leads to the second reason that bearing good fruit is essential to the Christian life. When we come to faith, receive the Holy Spirit, and bear the good fruit of the kingdom, we become an example to others, and give them reason to rejoice.
2. Paul said, "...so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia

and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”

- a. When the Thessalonians received the word with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and imitated Paul and his companions, they became an example to the surrounding areas of the power of the gospel and of what true faith should look like.
3. When we gather at diocesan synod, there is some opportunity to share what is happening in our churches. Usually the bishop spends some time bragging about ways that different churches are impacting their communities or serving in the kingdom. As we listen, we all rejoice in the strong faith and the good work that these churches are doing. We are encouraged as clergy about ways we could do similar things for the kingdom in our own communities.
 - a. New Life has been mentioned many times at our gatherings for different things we have done. When we mentioned our first mission trip to Ethiopia, it impacted other churches so much that people gave us donations on the spot, prayed with us, and came to encourage us about their own experiences in mission work.
4. Do we want to bear the fruit of the kingdom so that others will heap praise on us? No. We live for the glory of God, and his glory alone. Yet, we should be excited that our good Christian fruit as a community would impact, encourage, and bring other churches to rejoicing. We are watching a world fall apart around us. It is good that we can rejoice in the work of the kingdom that is being done in churches other than our own. We are one family. So, it is a great blessing when our work can give the same benefit to others.
5. Paul has shared two significant reasons that our bearing fruit as Christians is essential. We have all heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he lived and died for us, cleansed us by his blood, and rose from the dead, bringing us to everlasting life with him. When we come to faith and receive the Holy Spirit, we want to bear good fruit because it provides an assurance of our election; and it gives reason for other Christians and churches around us to rejoice in the Lord because of our good fruit.