

THEME – Imitators and influencers

Welcome and call to worship: Tim Bullock, Elm Hall Drive

Hello everyone, welcome to this week's Liverpool South Methodist online service. In the midst of our current situation in the North West, we are grateful to be able to still meet each week in this way.

Let's open this week's service with our call to worship.

Here we are Lord; your people, your Church meeting together in your presence. We welcome each other and we welcome You. Make yourself known to us in new ways through our worship, our prayers and our understanding of your Word today.

Song: O thou who camest from above

1 O THOU WHO CAMEST FROM ABOVE
The pure, celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

3 Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me.

2 There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze;
And, trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

4 Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley
CCL 59335

Prayers of Adoration and Confession – including The Lord's Prayer – John Greenwood, Elm Hall Drive

Reading – 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 – Mo Payne, Elm Hall Drive

1 Paul, Silas² and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

²We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴For we know, brothers and sisters² loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Song : My Jesus My Saviour

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord, there is none like You.
All of my days I want to praise
The wonders of Your
mighty love.

*Power and majesty,
praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
And the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name.*

My comfort, my shelter,
Tower of refuge and strength,
Let every breath, all that I am,
Never cease to worship You.

*I sing for joy
at the work of Your hands.
Forever I'll love You,
forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
Promise I have in You.*

*Shout to the Lord all the earth,
let us sing*

Darlene Zschech.
Thankyou Music.

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Sermon: Deacon Michaela Doherty - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 - Paul's threefold strategy for mission.

Imagine for a moment that you had never had the blessing of picking up a gospel and reading for yourself the stories and teachings of Jesus.

Imagine that you had never been to Sunday school, or been part of a church community where every Sunday you sat at the feet of a teacher or preacher and explored with them, the life of Christ?

It's hard to imagine isn't it – it must be a bit like trying to reach a destination without any road map or sat nav – as followers of Jesus, how would we find our way, how would we understand what we were called to be – who would show us?

But this kind of Christian experience was the reality for the new church at Thessalonica, Greece. This first letter to the Thessalonians, was possibly the first ever book in the New testament to be written, probably only about 20 years after the time of Jesus. There were no written accounts of the stories and teachings that we are so familiar with and even if at that time there were, many people would not have been able to read them anyway.

And it was into this context that Paul along with Silas and Timothy bring the good news of the gospel and what we can see in this passage is a threefold strategy that revealed to this Greek city the revelation of Christ

So firstly, they bring the stories of Jesus, they share His teachings, they bring their testimonies of lives transformed, they proclaim the gospel with all their might and all their words – Romans 10:17 states '*Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ*'

What a responsibility Paul had to share the message in a way that was truthful and authentic. It was the message of the cross, the message of sins forgiven and grace poured out – it was a message that brought salvation, a message that he had been trusted with, a message not to be watered down or made more palatable – to some it was a message of foolishness but as we read in 1 Corinthians to those who were being saved it was the power of God

Today you and I have been trusted with this message – a message to be intentionally proclaimed. I sometimes think evangelism falls off the radar of church priorities. Evangelism is not a dirty word, it's a wonderful, beautiful word. How glad I am that a long time ago some beautiful person took a risk and told me about the one who could change my life, who could forgive my sin and take away the

guilt and shame –we have good news to share, to proclaim, to shout about – his name is Jesus! What a beautiful name. There is always the risk of rejection and ridicule with evangelism but oh for the one, the one lost sheep would we gladly accept the persecution of the 99. Paul was not a great evangelist, he was actually just a normal person like you and I, but he decided to talk about Jesus, and do you know what, that was enough to turn the whole world upside down!

So secondly then, Paul came to the Thessalonians with the Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit who revealed the very person of Jesus to these people, overwhelming them with love and giving them a deep conviction that they truly were children of God, pouring out upon them grace that led to repentance, repentance that led to forgiveness and new life. The Holy Spirit, now by faith indwelling in them, changing them, transforming them. giving them the power to live Godly lives, filling them with a sense of purpose and direction and eternal hope –Paul said you know we did not just come to you with words, we came to you with the Spirit's power

And you and I just like those early Christians we need the Spirit's power in our lives – yes we need the word, we need the teachings and the stories and our precious bibles but we need the Holy Spirit too.

The word without the Spirit you dry up
The Spirit without the word – you blow up
But the Spirit and the word – you grow up.

A W. Tozer said *“The Spirit-filled life is not a special deluxe edition of Christianity. It is part and parcel of the total plan of God for His people.”*

Thirdly Paul, Silas and Timothy lived among these people; they moved into their neighbourhood and set before them an example of what discipleship looked like. They practiced before them the holy habits of prayer and hospitality of justice, creativity, mission and learning. They lived out their discipleship amongst these folk with authenticity. Their words were backed up by their actions and their behaviour gave credibility to what they were proclaiming. Paul's incarnational ministry represented that of Christ's – Christ who moves into our neighbourhood and dwells among us and as the Thessalonians watched Paul's life, they began to imitate him and so too imitating Christ himself. How empty and hollow are words if they are not backed up with action. I have always been inspired by the vision of the Eden project that started in Wythenshawe, Manchester where a group of Christians would move into a council estate and live amongst the people and get involved with them, they recognised a truth that, Jesus was a friend of the common people and there was a desperate need to show people the love and compassion of Jesus. For The Eden Project Preaching a message just wasn't enough. People needed to see the message lived out –and so they literally moved into the neighbourhood and lived out their discipleship amongst others, getting involved in schools work and community projects, working for justice for the poor and oppressed– These teams stretch all across the UK now and they've seen thousands of lives transformed, especially the lives of many young people and all this has happened through a Christian community intentionally living out the gospel in word and deed.

And as we look at Paul's threefold strategy to mission we can see it had the most amazing results, this church was being spoken about all over Greece. In fact Paul goes even further than that, he states that their faith

In God had become known everywhere! The church was growing and it was changing the whole Greek world.

Perhaps here in this very short but insightful letter God is giving us too a strategy that may even in our own context 2000 years on can bear great fruit for his kingdom

What if we took our stories, our testimonies of Jesus and fearlessly spoke his name? (Pakistan pastor testimony - 'In England you talk about the weather – In Pakistan we talk about Jesus.')

What if we once again put our trust in the Spirit's power to reveal to others the depth and height of God's love – not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.

What if we intentionally lived out the gospel message in our neighbourhoods through word and deed?

Could our churches too be those others are speaking about all over Liverpool?

Could our Circuit become an even greater light that others are drawn to?

How can we locally begin to intentionally implement these strategies into the year that's ahead of us? There is much to think about, much to pray about - Let's continue to work together, to seek God together and be amazed at what he will do in our midst.

Prayers of Intercession: Charlie Hardisty, Elm Hall Drive

Love never fails

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Love compels us to fight against coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty.

Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far.

Love compels us to give and act as one.

Now, it is clear that our futures are bound together more tightly than ever before.

As we pray in our individual homes – around the nation and around the world – we are united as one family.

So, let us pause and find a moment of peace, as we lift up our hearts together in prayer.

For the health workers tending the seriously ill
for the scientists working on a vaccination
for the researchers analysing data and identifying trends
for the media outlets working to communicate reality
for the supermarket workers, hygiene and sanitation providers
for the good news stories of recoveries and effective planning
for the singing from balconies by locked-down communities
for the recognition that isolation doesn't need to mean loneliness.

'Love...bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
Love never ends.'

Song: Father of everlasting grace

1 FATHER OF EVERLASTING GRACE,
Your goodness and your truth we praise,
Your goodness and your truth we prove;
You have, in honour of your Son,
The gift unspeakable sent down,
The Spirit of life, and power, and love.

2 Send us the Spirit of your Son,
To make the depths of Godhead known,
To make us share the life divine;
Send him the sprinkled blood to apply,
Send him our souls to sanctify,
To bless and seal us with this sign.

3 So shall we pray, and never cease,
So shall we thankfully confess
Your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,
With joy unspeakable adore,
And bless and praise you evermore,
And serve you as your hosts above:

4 Till, added to that heavenly choir,
We raise our songs of triumph higher,
And praise you with a bolder voice,
Out-soar the first-born seraph's flight,
And sing, with all our friends in light,
With everlasting love rejoice.

Charles Wesley
CCL59335

Blessing: Tim Bullock, Elm Hall Drive

That brings an end to our service for this week. As always, we'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who has been able to contribute and make this service possible, and to Deacon Michaela for sharing her message with us all this week.

I offer best wishes to everyone in their week ahead, may we all stay safe and continue to look out for one another.

A final prayer:

As we take our worship, praise and prayer from this place and into our daily lives, may our lives be sustained through the love of our Heavenly Father. May we feel the presence of our Saviour walking beside us, and know the power of the Spirit in both our actions and our words. Amen