

Sermon: Excite!

Psalm 96:1-13, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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Psalm 96:1-13

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nation, "The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity." Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. For the people of those regions report about us and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Sermon

A few years ago there was a movie that came out called **The Martian**. Matt Damon starred as an astronaut who gets stranded on Mars and must find a way to survive long enough for help to arrive. In one pivotal scene Damon's character, Mark Watney, is struggling to figure out how to grow food on Mars and one of the greatest challenges is a need for water to feed his crop of potatoes. That is where science kicked in. Watney had access to oxygen in his habitat and hydrogen fuel as well. The science says that when hydrogen and oxygen gases are present and a flame is added, then water is produced, but often this reaction begins with an explosion.

In this instance, the flame acts as a catalyst that initiates the chemical reaction. And science has found all kinds of catalysts in chemistry - one additional element that will stimulate a reaction. But catalysts are not just in chemistry experiments.

There is the friends, Jennifer and Jason, whom everyone else sees have feelings for one another - they have good chemistry. But it takes the intervention of two other friends who invite Jennifer and Jason out, but then cancel at the last minute, causing Jennifer and Jason to be on their first date together.

It is the late minutes substitute on the sports field that suddenly adds new energy and helps the tired team rally at the end of the game.

Catalysts are all around us, adding new energy and helping to change what is into what could be. In many ways, this was Paul's purpose in many of his letters, and we see it in our opening verses in 1 Thessalonians. "We always give thanks and remember you in our prayers... We know that God has chosen you... you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia." Here in this oldest writing in all the New Testament, we encounter Paul's use of thanksgiving and encouragement which he uses to inspire and give hope to his readers. It is like Paul is a cheerleader who is unable to be on the field in Thessalonica, but he can encourage and celebrate from the sidelines.

And maybe that is just the added hope that the believers in need. You see, when Paul first arrived in Thessalonica, he helped found the church there, but soon after there was intense opposition from the Jewish community. That pressure forced Paul to leave, continuing on to new towns and founding new worshipping communities as he went. But he sent Timothy back to check on the church in Thessalonica. When Timothy reported to Paul that things were still going, there was still a faithful church, but there was anxiety that Paul had failed to return - Paul understood that his words of encouragement could make a difference. This letter is the earliest known letter of Paul, it was the beginning of what would become a vital ministry that has come to influence the birth of the early church and the continued faith of the church today.

And beloved, God is still calling believers today to be catalysts of hope. People who are willing to energize and excite the Body of Christ, to stir us all from complacency and boredom, to move us forward in faith and hope. The Holy Spirit stirs individuals to

become more than innate material, not capable of more than just being there, into energetic life that creates and stirs and reacts to the environment around us.

Who among us has the ability to do this? Who among us can share a passion for life and God? Who among us can encourage the important work we are called to in mission and ministry? Who among us can help celebrate the amazing work that God is doing at White Lick Presbyterian? Who can take God's good news to the world around us, sharing hospitality and love and a calling to discipleship to family and friends, to neighbors and strangers?

If you find something tiresome, you have a few choices. You can do nothing and things will continue the way that they are. You can leave, and things will not change but you don't have to be a part of it. Or you can take a role in making things better, in reenergizing and revitalizing and renewing a community, a worship service, a community event. We can be more than people watching from a distance, this is our congregation, our faith, our calling - and we are called to participate, share and encourage along the way.

If you want to be a catalyst, it may begin with your gifts and passions that may stir new ministry or strengthen existing ones. You may be a great cheer leader, who pays close attention to what is happening, and knows how to celebrate and cheer on those who need encouragement. It could be that God is calling you to say yes. Yes, I can do this. Yes, you can do this and how can I help. Yes, and I will add to it with my time and energy and prayers.

Yes can help move White Lick and you forward in faith and love. How can I help can give the lift that takes something from a chore to a treat. Thank you for what you do can give the encouragement for someone to keep going and not give up. Each of us has the potential to be a catalyst in this place, and with new energy and hope, White Lick can continue to grow in it's service to members, the community, and the world. That is something worth being a part of. Thanks be to God for our calling to the church in the wild wood! Amen