

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost [Proper 28c]
November 16, 2025 Trinity Lutheran, Alamogordo

2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ **But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.** ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. ⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

In the Name of Jesus.

When you look around our world, do you feel a little rattled? Flags being burned, assassinations, marriage of man and woman being attacked even in the courts, failure to protect children—do it feel like we are standing on the shakiest of ground?

Your Lord knows all of this. Your Lord stands you in confidence. This confidence is founded on the Name he bestows on us in Baptism, on the justification he speaks on our behalf to his Father, on the promise he gives us that he is with us every day, even until the end of the age.

So now we swivel our head to look around and see this day, this generation in which our Lord has placed us. Do we feel confident? Maybe a little shaky as we see this disordered world we are in? People claiming to be confused about a man and a woman given to be married. Claiming to be baffled about such things as protecting a baby's life, or whether or not you should covet your neighbor's property and wealth.

Our world is disordered. So, what do we Christians do as we await the day of our Lord's return? In the hymn, we just sang,

Rise, my soul, to watch and pray; From your sleep awaken!

Be not by the evil day, Unawares o'ertaken.

We watch and pray. We see the sin around us, and the sin in our own lives, and we intercede to our Lord for ourselves and for neighbor. We are not naïve. As the hymn puts it, we are not ***Unawares o'ertaken***.

In this disordered world, the Apostle Paul gives encouragement to the Church in Thessalonica. Thessalonica, too, was set in a world spinning out of control, things appeared to be coming to a close.

Thessalonica is, of course, in Greece. The once great Greek civilization has by this time been taken over by the great Roman republic, and now the respect for law of the Roman republic has disintegrated into the Roman Empire ruled not by the rule of law but by the raw pursuit of power. Caligula has been assassinated, Claudius is now emperor; he has married his niece Agrippina, who will later poison him, and then Agrippina will later be murdered, seemingly by Nero, her son, who will end up being just one more murderous Emperor.

In this time of Emperor Claudius, in this day of murders, conspiracies, debauchery, of rejection of rule of law, of disorder, the Apostle Paul writes to the Church in Thessalonica:

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in *idleness* and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For we hear that some among you walk in *idleness*, not busy at work, but busybodies.

[2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 11]

The word we have in our translations is “idleness”—keep away from the brother who is walking in idleness, says Paul.

That word *idleness* makes it sound like the problem is laziness—“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” being a Bible verse that is not actually in the Bible. But Paul’s actual word here is quite different in the Greek. It’s not, in the first case, about being lazy or slothful.

His word in the Greek is, *disordered*. It’s the same root word as putting everything into proper order to support life. It’s a word of the institutions the Lord put in place for us when he created us—institutions such as marriage of man and woman, and of home, of neighbor and society, of property and wealth. This is found in the “orders of creation.”

This is the same root word as when Paul tells the Church in Corinth that all things should be done properly and in order. [1 Cor. 14:10] It’s the same root word as that which our Lord uses

to describe husbands and wives being ordered toward each other to serve each other [Eph. 5], and the same root word our Lord uses for us being set in order before authorities and rulers in the world [Titus 3:1].

So, Paul is describing a world of disorder, and is telling the Church how she is given to walk in this world.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from any brother who is walking *outside of order* and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For we hear that some among you walk in *disorder*, not busy at work, but busybodies.

[2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 11]

We are listening to Paul's words in what is now the last Sundays of the Church year—the Sundays up until Advent, which begins the new Church year. In the last Sundays of the Church year, we are given to look at is how the Church lives in these latter years as we wait for our Lord to come again to judge the living in the dead.

As we wait, it is a disordered world. The Lord's institutions are under attack. His institutions of the created order such as marriage of man and woman, of life and family and home, of neighbor and society, of property and wealth—these institutions of the orders of creation are under constant attack. But as we live in this disordered world, the Apostle gives us the encouragement of Christ Jesus for his Church:

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from any brother who is walking *outside of order* and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For we hear that some among you walk in *disorder*, not busy at work, but busybodies.

As we seek to walk in our Lord's good ordering of things, we are given to remember something else for our comfort: our enemy is not all the problems we can see of this disordered world. Our enemy is not our neighbor.

For, as Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, we do not struggle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Our enemy is not other people, even those who bring disorder, for other people are flesh and blood. Our enemy is not flesh and blood. Our enemy is Satan and his evil angels, the principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age.

Our enemy, that is, the devil and his demons, tempt and afflict us and our neighbor. In this temptation and affliction, the devil and the demons bring the disorder and rebellion against the Lord's gifts.

We see this disorder and rebellion. We see it in people teaching evil things about life and marriage and family to our children, we see it in our neighbor sinning against what the Lord has instituted for our blessing and benefit, and we see it ... in ourselves, in our own sinful flesh.

And when we see it in our own sinful flesh, when we finally let the Law of God show us not just the sin of our generation, but more importantly the sin of our own lusts and desires, then we have only one place to turn. As Paul gives it in his Second letter to the Church in Thessalonica (3:5):

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

The steadfastness of Christ, says the Apostle. Where we are not faithful to him, he is faithful to us. Where we have not been steadfast, he remains true.

He stands us in confidence. In our disordered world, in our fear of our own sin, as we stand under the accusation of the holy Law, our Lord stands us in a confidence founded on the Name he bestowed on us in Baptism, on the justification he speaks on our behalf to his Father, on the promise he gives us that he is with us every day.

The devil will continue doing his work of evil. He and his demons will continue to tempt, to afflict, to keep us under the accusation, in order to shake our consciences with fear.

Then he won't. It will be all over. Then our Lord comes again to judge the Living and the Dead, and Satan's lie will be over.

Then our eyes will see the steadfast One, the holy One, the One who forgives sins, the One who is faithful even when we are not. 2 Thessalonians 3:3:

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

Until that Last Day, we continue hearing the Gospel, hearing the Word that Jesus Christ is crucified for our sins, that Jesus stands us before his Father justified. In this world of disorder, we fear not.

In the Name of Jesus.