**Sermon 8/25/19**

**2nd Thessalonians 1:3-4 & 2:13-3:5**

One day an old donkey, owned by a Texas farmer fell into an abandoned well.

The donkey started making a racket from the bottom of the well.

He was heehawing up a storm.

When the farmer found him, he had no idea how to get him out of the well.

Since the donkey was old and somewhat crippled,

          and the well needed to be covered up, the farmer reluctantly decided

          the best thing to do would be to just bury the old donkey in the well.

He invited some of his neighbors over to help him.

They all grabbed a shovel and started digging and shoveling dirt into the well.

At first the donkey cried out in protest, but soon, the old donkey quieted down.

After several minutes of shoveling dirt,

          the farmer looked down into the well and was amazed at what he saw.

For every shovel full of dirt that was tossed on his head,

          the old donkey would shake it off and step up on the dirt.

As they continued to fill up the well,

         the donkey continued to shake off the dirt and step up.

Before long the dirt level reached the edge of the well and the old donkey stepped

          over the ledge of the well and trotted off heehawing and leaping for joy.

We can learn much from this persistent donkey.

In this life, we will have lots of dirt, and problems, and difficulties, shoveled on us.

With perseverance and faith, we can shake them off, and step up on top of them.

God can turn our adversity into success if we trust in him and refuse to give up.

We should not become weary in doing good,

          for at the proper time we will be successful, if we do not give up.

The church in Thessalonica faced a lot of persecutions and trials.

But Paul commended them,

          and reminded them he was constantly thanking God because of them.

Their faith was growing, and the love all of them had for one another was increasing.

Paul boasted about their perseverance, and faith in God, and love for one another,

          among all of God's churches.

He wrote this letter to encourage them not to give up.

Don't quit. Keep on persevering to the end.

What they believed was important.

What they were doing was making a difference,

          not only in Thessalonica, but throughout the whole area.

The Church is not a channel of inspiration for uninvolved observers,

          but a community of involved participants.

We say we go to church, give to the church, support the cause of the church.

But actually we are the Church, God's church.

As we keep on gathering together as God's Church,

          we keep on growing in our faith.

And our faith will spread to those around us, and make a difference in their lives.

A modern day evangelist lamented,

          "Whenever the apostle Paul visited a city, the residents started a riot.

          When I visit one, they serve tea."

The church in Thessalonica, like many of Paul's churches,

          was born amid violent upheaval.

In the book of Acts, we read about the angry mob which took offense

          at Paul's work and chased him out of town,

          accusing him of "turning the world upside down".

Well, he did turn the world inside, outside, and upside down.

Generally, people do not start riots without a reason, and in Paul's case they had one.

Almost everywhere he visited, an enthusiastic church came to life,

          provoking the jealousy of the Jewish and Roman establishments.

They tried to stop Jesus by putting him to death.

But it didn't work.

People tried to stop Paul, but it didn't work either, because he was doing God's work.

And God is quite a bit more powerful, and determined, and loving, than us humans.

The concern is that it is easy to settle for sharing a cup of tea, and a bit of polite talk.

But God wants us to change things.

He wants us to make a difference in people's lives.

A survey was taken in which people were asked to name

          all those who had won gold medals in the Olympics.

But only a small handful were remembered.

They were also asked to name the ten richest people in the country,

          all the presidents of the United States, all the Oscar winners,

          and all the Generals in all the wars.

But people came up with very few names.

The reason is, although these people had been important,

         few of them really touched the lives of the people personally,

Then readers were asked to name a different group of people:

     a few teachers who had helped them in their journey through school,

     some friends who helped them in a difficult time,

     those who had taught them something worth-while,

     a few people who made them feel appreciated and special,

     and people they enjoyed spending time with.

These are questions for which we have answers.

Because the people who truly make a difference in our lives

     are not those with the most impressive credentials,

     the most money, or the most notoriety,

     but the ones who express their care through acts of love, and kindness.

The Thessalonians were known not only for their faith and perseverance.

They were remembered for their acts of love and compassion,

          their kindness and caring for others.

They were known for sharing the Good News with everyone they met,

          whether the people listened, or ignored them.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "May Jesus Christ and God our Father,

          encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word."

May God continue to strengthen our hearts and encourage us in everything we do.

Paul asked them to pray for him and his coworkers.

He frequently solicited prayers, knowing how important prayer is.

And he reminded them he was praying constantly for them.

The message was spreading - and for that to continue, he asked for prayer.

Prayer is important to help us see, and take advantage of,

          the opportunities which are right in front of us.

As we, like the Thessalonians, continue to do God's work throughout the world,

          we will experience the peace, love, and joy, which only God can give.

It may not be as exciting as a riot,

          but it will be a whole lot more exciting than a simple cup of tea.

AMEN