**Sermon 8/11/19**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

Following a war, a small orphanage was filled with two dozen very young children

           whose parents had been killed in the battle.

The staff worked very hard to care for these children,

          but they had one serious problem.

They could not get these little children to eat their meals.

They tried everything they could think of – all the usual tricks.

They filled a spoon with food, pretended it was an airplane, and flew around,

            trying to get the children to open their mouths so the plane could land.

But the children were not interested, and kept their mouths closed.

The orphanage had plates with pictures on them,

              and they encouraged the kids to eat up their food,

              so that they could see the pictures on their plates.

But the children showed no interest in the pictures.

Whatever trick the staff tried, it failed.

The children would not eat their food.

Every meal time nearly all the food was thrown away.

One day, a little boy named Jamie was brought to the orphanage.

Jamie was very small, and very quiet.

None of the children paid any attention to him.

At dinnertime, when his plate of food was placed in front of him,

           Jamie grabbed his spoon, and in just a minute or two, his food was gone.

Then he looked round and saw that the little girl sitting next to him

           had not touched her dinner.

Without saying a word, he grabbed her dish, and ate that as well.

Jamie then looked up and saw the boy sitting across him not touched his food.

He reached over the table, took his plate and started eating that one as well.

The next day exactly the same thing happened again.

By the third day the little girl sitting next to Jamie, whispered to herself:

          “I'm not going to let him take my dinner!”

She started to eat, and quickly cleaned her plate.

At the next meal, the little boy sitting on the other side of Jamie,

          and the boy sitting across from him, quickly ate their meals.

By the end of the week all the children were eating and enjoying their meals.

Paul was impressed by the faith of the Thessalonians.

They welcomed the message even in the midst of severe suffering.

They were filled with the peace, and joy, and enthusiasm, of the Holy Spirit.

They were hungry and eager to feast on the word of God.

They were enthusiastic about sharing God's love and forgiveness with others.

When others saw their peace and joy they paid attention to the gospel message.

And they were contagious, they infected others with their enthusiasm and faith.

The Good News spread out not only in Macedonia and Achaia.

Their faith in God become known everywhere.

Others saw the difference it made in their lives,

           and they were eager to experience it themselves.

The Thessalonians believed God would do what he promised he would do.

They held on to the hope of one day being with God for all eternity.

Hope is a powerful force.

Some years ago, during a New York City University concert,

           a distinguished concert pianist suddenly became ill, and could not continue.

An elderly music teacher at the college, nicknamed Herman,

           rose from the audience and walked on stage.

Herman sat down at the piano, and with great mastery completed the performance.

At the party after the concert, a faculty member asked Herman

          how he was able to play the difficult pieces from memory with such great skill.

Herman answered, "In 1939, when I was a budding young concert pianist,

     I was arrested and placed in a Nazi concentration camp.

     Putting it mildly, the future looked bleak.

     But I knew that in order to keep the flicker of hope alive,

      that I might someday play again, I needed to practice every day.

     I drew a keyboard on my bed board, and began by fingering a piece

          from my repertoire late one night.

     The next night I added a second piece, and before long,

           I was running through my entire repertoire.

     I did this every night for five years.

    It so happens the piece I played tonight at the concert hall

            was part of that repertoire.

    That constant practice is what kept my hope alive.

     Every day I renewed my hope that I would one day be able to play

            my music again on a real piano, and in freedom."

Hope is the power we hold on to when we become discouraged and we want to quit.

Paul told the Thessalonians:    We remember before our God and Father,

             your work produced by faith,

             your labor prompted by love,

            and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Thessalonians did not back down when they faced struggles.

Their hope in times of great trials and sufferings provided them

          with the endurance to continue doing God's work in difficult circumstances.

It was not always easy, but their faith and hope carried them through.

They did not give up. They did not quit.

Like Herman in the prison camp, they continued no matter how difficult.

When our efforts are prompted by love, and rooted in hope,

          we don't give up, and we do make a difference.

People may not listen to our words, but they will take note of our lifestyles.

How we act is proof to them that our message is true, and it makes a difference.

Some years ago, a hunter was walking through the African jungle.

He came upon a huge dead elephant.

A pygmy was standing beside it.

Amazed, the hunter asked, "Did you kill this elephant?"

The pygmy answered, "Yes."

The hunter asked, "How could such a little person as you, kill a huge beast like that?"

"I killed it with my club," the pygmy answered.

The astonished hunter looked at the pygmy, then looked at the elephant,

             and asked: "How big is your club?"

The pygmy replied, "There's about 60 of us."

As individuals, we may look at our own abilities,

         and believe there is very little we are able to accomplish.

But take a lesson from the pygmy: sharing our faith, loving others,

        doing God's work in the world, is not a solo event.

God never intended for us to do everything all by ourselves.

God has promised to be with us always, leading, guiding, helping us.

And we have each other, building one another up, encouraging one another,

          working together.

We are more effective together than on our own.

Together, with God's help, amazing things can happen.

We can pass on our enthusiasm, our faith, and hope, and love.

Even though the Thessalonians faced a lot of pressure from the outside world,

        Together they lived in a way which brought honor to God.

They were examples of faith.

They received the Word of God and followed it.

And that word comes to us with power from God himself.

The Thessalonian Christians served enthusiastically.

Many of them had been pagans, serving idols.

When Paul came with the Gospel of Christ,

               they made a complete change and became servants of God.

They served God expectantly.

They believed God would do what he said he would do.

While they were waiting, they did not stop working for the Lord.

And their faith in God become known everywhere.

Faith, Hope, and Love, really can produce miracles

AMEN