

Living in the Grey Area

Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

*I saw the light, no more
darkness, no more night*

*Now I'm so happy no sorrow in
sight; praise the Lord I saw the
light.*

~Hank Williams

Congratulations! You've seen the light, found the Lord, a new journey of faith has begun. So now what? Well, you begin to listen differently, read a little more, find time to pray each day, attend worship, start to get involved. Maybe it's Bible Study or the choir, or signing up to help at the Bazaar or the Soup Kitchen. Maybe you discover what a Presbyterian Potluck really can mean. It's all good, just like God said in Genesis as He created the world and all that is in it. "This is good." (Genesis 1:31) Then you wake up one day, pat yourself on the back and say, "I've made it. Got it. Done. Been there and have the Polaroid to prove it." Nothing more to do here with this faith stuff; just keep the ball rolling. Right?

Paul wrote this letter the people of Thessalonica, to praise them for a job well done. Unlike some of the other churches in the early days of Christianity, Paul did not need to scold or cajole these believers. Things were going well. The truths of the faith were deepening within the hearts of those who attended

worship. The church was embedding itself into the fabric of the city, and into the faith lives of its people. But Paul knew that a different kind of danger lurked for those congregations who had their facts and their faith running in a straight line. Complacency, routine, getting too comfortable with how well things were going, were all dangers to a church that had worked so hard to achieve all it had done.

"Beware the grey areas," Paul might have said. "Beware the complacency. Beware the desire to think you have it all, know it all, and have nothing new to experience in your holy life; nothing to be challenged with; nothing to stretch your imagination or your understanding of God. Stay alert. Be watchful for Him to show you something new or unexpected. Discipline yourself to not be satisfied with whatever is the easiest path to completing a faith task. Always be a living example of Christ: to your family, to your neighbours, to your community." "It is when we stop being diligent with our soul matters," Paul said, "that the 'thief' comes (v2), and brings with it: darkness (v4), despair, doubt."

Paul said to the people of Thessalonica,

*"[We] are children of the light
and children of the day." (v5)*

We are people of faith. We have found salvation, either by gentle nurturing over the years,

or perhaps suddenly, as Hank Williams sang,

*"Then Jesus came like a
stranger in the night; praise the
Lord I saw the light."*

We have worked hard, and stretched our souls over the years, to become the faithful Christians that we are. But Paul challenges us to ask ourselves each and every day: As a child of the light, are you living in the light? Or is your heart tinged with a little grey? Is it possible that the warm and cozy comfort of your faith is actually holding you back from seeing a little more light? Is it possible that the idea you have learned everything there is to know about life and Godly love, is blocking you from seeing something new God would like to show you? Is it possible that your fear of 'opening up the can of worms' on what you believe and why, is preventing you from seeing just how big God's love really is out there; even big enough to help you step out in your faith a little more than you ever thought possible?

Churches can get stuck in the grey areas too. For every church building out there in this city of ours, there was a group of faithful believers who gathered together to worship, to raise money, to build, to grow, to expand, to make their place in the community, and to provide meaningful programs and activities for its people. And then the leaders of the various committees woke up

one day and realized, “We made it! We look like what a church community should look like. We do the things churches do. We’ve made it!

Then...sometimes, they stop trying to find new light. They work very hard at “staying sober”, (v6) and maintaining what they have, sometimes forgetting that there may be new things to do, or new ways to do familiar things; things to change around, things to experiment with. They are a church of the light. But are they still living in the light?

So how come we can get stuck in the grey? Living some, of what we know and understand it means, to be a child of God, or a community of faith, but maybe not as ‘bright’ as we could be for the glory of God? Fear, perhaps? Fear of failing, Fear of stepping out before having all the answers, Fear of having to change our opinions on things. But not just fear. It’s nice being comfortable. It’s

nice enjoying the fruits of our faithful labours. It’s nice not having to keep changing all the time. It’s so tiring and well, different.

But if you listen carefully to Paul, he was not suggesting to his listeners to change everything, to upset the whole applecart. He was saying, ‘Be watchful. Enjoy what is comfortable and familiar, but also, be ready for new opportunities.. Don’t let every answer become ‘Because we’ve always done it that way!’ Don’t ‘fall asleep’ (v9) on Christ. Don’t just be a child or a church of the light. Live in the light.

Paul finished with,

*“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.
(v11)”*

Keep doing what you are doing. But keep your eye on the light. “How?” you might ask

yourself. “I’m old, my bones creak when I move ,and I’m rather set in my ways.” The answer?

*“You are all children of the light and children of the day.”
(v5)*

Children giggle. Children are silly sometimes. They try things, skin their knees, get up, and try again. They succeed, and they fail. But they keep exploring, experimenting, let go of past hurts and return quickly to giggling with delight once again. Friends, it doesn’t matter your age, or how often your bones creak and groan. It’s your willingness to explore a new shimmer of light on the horizon. Will you grab hold of a sunbeam? Will you be a sunbeam? Will you step out of the grey area?

A sunbeam, a sunbeam, Jesus wants me for a sunbeam.

A sunbeam, a sunbeam, I’ll be a sunbeam for him.

~Nellie Talbot