Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 25
Year A

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18
Psalm 1
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-46

What was going on in Paul's life that led him to write this letter to the people at Thessalonica? Why did he feel the need to defend his work? There seems to be two major themes in this early passage – the motivation of the preacher and the responsibility of the preacher to proclaim this message.

In this short portion of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, we see some comments that might be curious. Paul states that he never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed. What would cause him to make that statement, along with the statement about his treatment in Philippi? In this time, there were two general groups of traveling preachers – those like Paul who were proclaiming the kingdom of God and itinerant philosophers who were trying to make a quick buck. Obviously, anyone who had suffered as Paul did in Philippi and continued the work was not in this ministry for the money. He was of a different group than these philosophers. What was his motivation then?

In the last verse of this segment, Paul clearly states his motivation – "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you…" It was Paul's love for the people of Thessalonica that he ministered to them. This should be our motivation also. It is our love for the people of Christian County that leads us to reach out with food to those around us with God's love. It is not to promote ourselves, but to fulfill the mission God has placed on us.

Paul tells us that this ministry is a sacred trust that God has given each of us – not just those of us who are ordained, but all Christians. In our baptism, we each become part of the priesthood of believers, entrusted with the job of proclaiming God's good news. This is not a role to be taken lightly as it can bring trials our way. Our word martyr comes from the Greek word for witness. By witnessing to God's plan for the world, we are opening the door for persecution. We only need to look at how people like Martin Luther King and Nelson Madela were treated to understand the reality that is was not only the early church that faced persecution, but in our time also.

Who would take such chances? What type of person would open themselves to persecution today? Only a person motivated by love, not just of their own, but of all God's creation would venturing out to do this work. Dr. King wasn't just concerned about how blacks were treated in this county. He fought for the rights of all who were disadvantaged. He wanted everyone to be treated fairly. Likewise, Paul was concerned that everyone should hear the message of God's Kingdom. We are called to follow these men and others to spread the news. Mother Theresa of Calcutta went into the worst situations through love. Jackson Kemper came to Missouri to spread

the gospel through love. This church was founded in Ozark through love. It is for each of us to take our place in spreading the good news of God to everyone we meet through love.

But, beyond reaching out to share the Good News, we must continue to follow up with those we reach. Paul did not just start a church in a community and move on to the next one, leaving the churches to fend for themselves. He wrote to them. He sent others to minister to them. And, whenever possible, he returned to those cities time and again to strengthen the saints. To be successful in spreading the gospel message, we must be persistent in our efforts. We must nurture the relationships and follow up with those who visit us. We must do the work if we expect to see results.

Paul worked his ministry through long hours of preaching and teaching. His focus was driven by his love for the people he met. God is challenging us to have that same focus and drive in Ozark, Missouri. As we do our part, God will bless our efforts and bring the harvest.