

## ***“A life worthy of God”***

**October 30, 2011**

*Text: Psalm 43, 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13*

### I.

Our text from Thessalonians that I just shared with us urges us to lead **lives worthy of God**. Wow! That’s no small challenge—lives **worthy of God**.

This exhortation from the **Apostle Paul** nudges us towards self-assessment. Do we sometimes wonder: how are we doing, God? Are we doing what you would *will* us to do? Are we making you proud?

We know you care, Creator God. We know you have great passion for our human situation. We heard you in **Hosea 11** where, upset with Israel, still, you cried out:

*How can I give you up, O Israel? How can I hand you over, my people? Even when you stumble, my compassion grows warm and tender. For I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will NOT come in wrath.*

Friends, God has made up God’s mind about us. God’s love is everlasting. God’s forgiveness and mercy are to the ends of the earth. The question for us is, *how are we doing?*

### II.

In our reading this morning from **Psalm 43**, the Psalmist sounds like a wounded soul. He sounds like a victim. CHECK OUT *The Message* on this, the Bible in contemporary language:

***Clear my name, God; stick up for me against these loveless, immoral people. Get me out of here, away from these lying degenerates.***

Whoever he is, the Psalmist sounds more than a little upset. Going on ...

***I counted on you, God. Why did you walk out on me? Why have these outrageous people been able to upset me?***

The Psalmist may have a legitimate beef. He may really be a victim, of who knows what abuse or mistreatment or indifference. Many of us here this morning might feel like we—too—have been a victim in our life journey.

1. A victim of bad parenting ... or some flagrant bias at work.
2. A victim of some investment where we were lied to ...

Since the collapse of our economy a couple years back, imagine all the people who feel victimized in some way: with a foreclosure on our house; in education where tuitions have gone up; with globalization and the loss of our jobs to China or India and, with the loss of our job, of course, the loss of health care.

If we think about it, we could argue that countless millions in our country have been victimized by (1) the greed of Wall Street and corporate America, and (2) the paralysis of our national government.

### III.

Like the **Psalmist**, there's a lot of *poor me* going around in recent years. Still, we don't want to wallow in our self pity. We don't want to be pathetic. If we're not careful, the stupor of victimization can lead us in the wrong direction in life. It can lead to where we're always blaming somebody else for our life—always a *no win* situation.

A question: Is the **Psalmist** looking to God for comfort and reassurance as he begins to stand up and take responsibility for his life? Or, is he looking to God with the expectation that God will solve his problems, as if he were powerless himself to do anything about them?

*Get me out of here*, he cries out. *I counted on you, God, what's up?*

It's human to want God to fix the things that are out of balance in our lives. But that doesn't seem to be the way that God works. God works through us ... through the countless decisions we make day after day, week after week. God works through us, in all of our ups and downs. It's not easy. My guess is: God gets frustrated.

Still, it's up to us to do our part; to keep moving forward, sorting our lives out, working our way through things—aiming, always, for higher spiritual ground.

### IV.

That's certainly what Paul is encouraging the Christians in his churches to do. All the time, he's exhorting them, urging them, praying for them ... to seek higher spiritual ground. To aim high—emulating Christ—lifting up the common good; in other words: taking responsibility for their lives.

We see this in all of his letters to the different churches he helped start and grow. To the **Corinthians**: *Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.*

To the **Galatians**: *So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. When ever we can, let's work for the good of all.*

To the **Philippians**: *Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, pleasing and commendable ... if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Do these things!*

And finally, to the **Romans**: *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection. Rejoice in hope ... be patient in suffering ... persevere in prayer ... extend hospitality to strangers. Live in harmony with one another ... don't be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In other words, as **Paul** is encouraging the Thessalonians: ***Lead a life worthy of God.***

And we can't do that if we're acting pathetic ... if we're too much into the *poor me, woe is me* behaviors.

## V.

***A life worthy of God*** is a beautiful thing, but it's not something we can ever really claim for ourselves. ***A life worthy of God*** is more about hope.

We hope we are worthy. We hope what we do—the choices we make—are pleasing to God. We hope our efforts to lift up the common good, to live in harmony with one another are reflective of God's will for our lives.

Yet, when we think about the wounded among us, those who—in whatever ways—have been beaten down by life, we believe, as Christians, that everyone is worthy. There is no human being who, seeking God with heartfelt confession, is NOT worthy of God's grace and God's love.

To be worthy as a human being is to be bathed in humility, in a humbleness of spirit. It's not something we claim for ourselves; yet, it's something we claim for every human being who approaches God with a gracious and humble spirit.

To lead lives worthy of God is a calling, therefore, to do what we think Jesus would do. In thinking about this, we simply cannot ignore God's preferential option for the poor and the downcast that runs throughout the Bible. It's simply inescapable.

As Christians, every day, we are called to *take up our cross and follow Jesus*. That cross always points towards an advocacy for the poor. It points towards justice and fairness. It points towards speaking truth to power.

In part, this is the meaning of the recent Wall Street protests. For some, as well, it's the meaning of the Tea Party movement. At a very basic level, people are upset. They sense that things aren't right with our country and they are desperate for a better day.

## VI.

**A life worthy of God** is a life of compassion and love; it's a life of peace with justice. It's a life committed to leveling the playing field. The character and sustainability of any great nation is, in part, a measure of the gap that exists between the rich and the poor within its borders.

**Jeffrey Sachs** is an expert on international economy who also calls himself a *clinical economist*. In his book, **The Price of Civilization, The Reawakening of American Virtue and Prosperity**, a book that deals extensively with the economic woes of our nation, the first sentence of his book reads:

*At the root of America's economic crisis lies a moral crisis: the decline of civic virtue among America's political and economic elite.*

Going on, he says, *A society of markets, laws, and elections is not enough if the rich and powerful fail to behave with respect, honesty, and compassion toward the rest of society and toward the world. ... Without restoring an ethos of social responsibility, there can be no meaningful and sustained economic recovery.*

## VII.

In seeking to lead **a life worthy of God**, we're called to aim high, to have high expectations of ourselves and to live in harmony with one another. We're called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. For, to some extent, the Christian life is always a life of sacrificial love.

In these challenging times of our lives, the heart of our Christian faith is a passionate commitment to do as Paul admonishes the **Thessalonians**:

*To increase and abound in love for one another.* For this is what is pleasing to God. What God wants is our good choices, day after day. Not our perfection, but our good choices. These good choices build up and they make us who we are. We become the aggregate of the choices we make:

- Choices that deepen the bonds of our family and community life.
- Choices that bring hope and peace with justice to all people.
- Choices that honor the gift of life and reflect **a life worthy of God**.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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