

"Make Known"
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 and Isa. 12
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Give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name says the prophet.

So, which of these categories fits you best this morning?

Are you in giving thanks mode,

elated about the election, convinced that with the executive branch,
the House and most of the Senate in the same party,

all manner of things will get done?ⁱ

Or are you calling on God's name,

terrified that with the executive branch, the House
and most of the Senate are now in one party,

things will be done that you feel won't be best for the country?

As a nation we are just as divided as we were last Monday,
as any glance at Facebook reveals.

One of the current Moderators of our denomination, Jan Edmiston,
pastored a church in Washington DC for twenty years.

On her Facebook page, she shared that in those years,
the day after *every* election was a time

for comforting at least some of her parishioners.

Every election cycle a Senator or Congressman lost a re-election bid,
people in her congregation lost their jobs,

or the person they were married to lost a job,

or the person they were dating lost a job,

and was suddenly moving to the home office
in a state far from the District.

With the change in administration

that is now happening to a lot of people and families

who didn't think ten days ago that they would be leaving town.

For churches like Jan's, elections meant relationships in the congregation
were lost and ended. Here in Blacksburg

we are simply being careful who we share our tears with,

or who we share our shouts of joy with.

I've been reading all the same things you have,

much of it helpful and community building,

some of it not so much.

A pastor friend in Atlanta who is unhappy about the outcome

wrote that in the short run she is not going to post anything

that is not consistent with Philippians 4:8:

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,

whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,

whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence

*and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing the things that you have learned
and received and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you."*

Yes, the nation is still divided right down the middle,
since the popular vote went to Clinton by a smidge.
But the sight of Clinton nonetheless conceding the election
once again moved my heart to the core
as our democracy upheld its most sacred traditions
around the peaceful transfer of power.
My own soul has been soothed in part
by living with a man who reads a whole lot of ancient history
and has a habit at the dinner table of spouting
some perfect description of what is happening Washington
that was written over two thousand years ago,
except that it was going on in Constantinople or Rome.
So no matter what your position, it *is* somewhat important
to remember, as Ecclesiastes says,
that there isn't anything new under the sun.ⁱⁱ

Within the first day or two after the election a number of groups
sprang up Never My President, Not My President groups.
I did not appreciate that in response to President Obama
and I have no respect for it now.
Working for change, exercising free speech,
even acting boldly in ways that are in keeping
with the health of democratic institutions can be good and admirable,
but purposefully working in opposition
to the very meaning of citizenship
is irresponsible and rebellious.

Either of those words, "irresponsible" or "rebellious,"
is a better translation of the word Greek word
in our reading from Second Thessalonians today
the word that Eugene Petersen translates as "lazy"
and which our pew bibles, the NSRV translates as "idleness."
Idleness or laziness sound like folks are just sitting around,
but the scholars who I check in with most weeks
say that "irresponsible" or "rebellious,"
would have been the better choice.

Paul is talking *to* the church *about* the church,
about people who know what is required but don't do it,
or think they are the exception
and so place a burden on the rest of the community.

Paul zeros in on the example of eating other's food
without having pitched in to help pay for it.
Nothing is said about *why* idleness or irresponsibility was going on,
but scholars love to speculate
and they've offered at least two options.
One is that maybe there were people in that congregation who thought
Jesus was coming back right away, so what is the point
of working hard or working at all?
Another suggestion is that they were using their faith
as an excuse not to be engaged in the world.
But Paul's entire ministry makes clear that engagement with the world,
indeed taking risks to change the world, is central to Christian life.

We may not relate very well to not pitching in
because Jesus will be here soon,
despite the sign on that church in Christiansburg
that prayed Jesus would come before the election.
But using faith as an excuse for irresponsible behavior
is something that still happens all the time.
Think of Christians who place all their emphasis
on life after death, and therefore do nothing
to help change the circumstances
of neighbors who suffer or are in need now.
Then there are people who announce vehemently that
public issues should not be addressed by Christians
because the church is no place for politics.,
That attitude has always struck me as really odd since
Jesus was put to death in the first place
because he was judged to be a threat to the state.
My professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Theology,
Walter Brueggemann, still preaches and writes better
about the intersection of religion and politics
than almost anyone else I know.
When I was in seminary Walter regularly preached and spoke in churches
where inevitably someone would complain
that he ought to leave politics alone.
"I would," Walter would say, smiling as he lifted his bible,
"but it's in the book."

In the letter to the church in Thessalonica,
Paul insists that issues of responsibility
within the community of faith *have* to be addressed:
... "faith does not wait for another to labor,
for another to think, for another to pray.
Faith plunges in to the reality of everyday life,
even as it also insists that [everyday] life

is not the whole story"ⁱⁱⁱ
Thankfully the other part of the story is represented today
by our scripture from Isaiah,
an exultant song that is an affirmation of faith
and announcement of God's sovereignty.
Our reading falls at the end of the first 12 chapters,
and was probably written during the early career
of Isaiah of Jerusalem, who is announcing
Judah's eventual deliverance from Assyria.
God's wondrous deeds are listed, including the exodus from Egypt.
God has saved in the past and will save in the future.
The people can give thanks and be joyful
even as they wait for God's promised future to arrive.
Meanwhile our job is to be faithful witnesses,
making God's faithfulness known
being unafraid, singing God's praise,
drawing from the well of salvation now
and yes, shouting out our joy.

Think of these verses as the first act closer,
a big number with not only all the actors, singers,
dancers, acrobats, and extras on the stage,
but also the audience,
who've been invited to come up and take part.
It is the first act, there is a lot more to the story, of course.
The Book of Isaiah was written by at least three Isaiah's
and there is going to be suffering and hard times,
a lot of hard times, but even right here at the beginning
the outcome is sure because *the rule of God is sure*.
God is in charge no matter how things look
so get up out of your seats, grab a noisemaker,
climb on up to the stage, and sing.

Trust God and announce your trust, make it known,
and, oh and by the way, if you're not going do
the day to day work of making God known,
don't eat the refreshments.
They are for the people who built the set.

Okay, that's not in Isaiah.

That is Paul's solo from Second Thessalonians.
Paul knows the church could be, should be a permanently joyful cast party
and every single person is invited, no question, everyone,
but please, he writes, don't take advantage of the goodness.
Chip in to help so as not to burden
others who have worked long and hard
to make God's greatness known.

For one thing, whether the focus is the national stage
or the local church, real engagement is the right thing to do,
and for another, our children and grandchildren are watching.
The story of how we react now toward our nation
and toward our church, that will be the story
they learn about how you honor their obligations
and how you make your commitments real.
Our stories, after all, are the way we tell each other
the most important things about our lives.

One November almost twenty years ago,
the Finance Committee at my church in Atlanta
decided to collect stories about stewardship.
They talked to each other and other members of the church
and gathered the stories into a little booklet.
More than one page contained a story
about sitting on the pew as a child on Sunday morning,
about learning how to give from a parent,
or struggling to make choices about the use
of time, skills, and money
that demanded sacrifice or change.

The booklet helped us recognize
that growing in stewardship of all that we have and all that we are
is not something that *happens*. It has to be learned.

Before it can be learned, and before it can be learned
it has to be demonstrated.

Some of us had good teachers, some had none.

The stories in the booklet invited us to learn from one another.

But they did more than that.

They invited us to make the journey from learning to doing.

Some of the stories came from children,

It was very powerful to realize then and now
that we are the people whose stories
children will tell later in life.

What story do you want the children in your life—
your own kids, your grandkids,

the kids who are here every Sunday in the pews
what story do you want the children in your life
to learn about honoring the nation?

What story will your giving to the church teach
about their citizenship in the realm of God? Amen.

ⁱ That was the situation eight years ago, you may remember, for the first 24 months of the Obama administration.

ⁱⁱ Then there is my son, Tucker, who when I was texting with him after the election replied that he has been reading Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. I was impressed, and also thought that Stoicism will be a refuge for many.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cousar, et al, *Texts for Preaching, Yr C*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY, 1994 p. 600.