

A Living Church

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Preacher: Rev Colin Macleod

[0 : 00] Well friends, good morning. A warm welcome to our service today. May the Lord bless us as together we seek to explore the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We welcome any visitors among us and those joining us online. May the Lord bless us and be near to us as together we worship Him this morning.

Well, my name is Colin MacLeod and I'm ministering back and with James' recent retirement, the Presbytery have appointed me as your interim moderator. In taking up this role, I count it as a real privilege and I will do everything I can to support Calamurdo and work alongside the Kirk Session and you as a congregation as we seek to work towards filling the vacancy of senior minister in the congregation.

I'll say a little bit more about that at the close of the service. I've been asked just to highlight the bulletin sheet that's available today. It's full. I won't even attempt to go through it because it's like an essay.

Please do take your time to look through. There's lots of information on there. Upcoming meetings this week all are scheduled. There's tea and coffee in the hall after the service this morning. All are very welcome. On Monday the 15th of July, the Kirk Session will meet in Kennet Street Session room at 7pm. That's an important one to take note, please, Elders.

And then also there's a note here about the free breakfast at the free church. If anyone would like to help with the annual free breakfast on Sunday the 21st of July, please email the church office, not the church officer, and get in touch with Peggy McLennan.

[1 : 26] That's information for you. Also, there was an update shared last night. Sad news that an elder of the congregation, Charlie Finlayson, had passed away. We remember very much the family, Catherine and Rury, and we commend them to the Lord that his peace and mercy would uphold them at this time in their sad loss.

We'll be gathered together this morning to worship the Lord. And we begin by singing to his praise from Psalm 121. Psalm 121. Singing the psalm from the Psalter, page 416 in our Blue Psalm books.

And we'll sing this whole psalm to the tune French. I to the hills will lift mine eyes. From whence doth come mine aid. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that thee keeps. Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumbers not, nor sleeps. Psalm 121. We'll stand and sing together.

Amen. I to the hills will lift my eyes.

[2 : 37] From whence doth come my aid. My safety cometh from the Lord, who heaven and earth hath made.

Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will he slumber that thee keeps.

Behold, he that keeps Israel, he slumber that thee keeps. Israel, he slumber that thee keeps.

The Lord, he keeps the Lord my shape.

On thy light and of stay. The Lord, my life, thee shall not spite.

[3 : 51] Nor yet the sun by day. The Lord, my soul, he shall preserve me from all ill.

Henceforth thy going, our children. God keep forever.

We'll bow in prayer together. our lord and our god on this your day we bow before you and give you thanks for this opportunity this privilege of singing praise to you the living god together and we ask you lord from the outset of our time as we worship and sing praise as we bow in prayer as we bring to you lord our petitions and as we express to you in prayer the things that are most upon our hearts and minds we do so lord in humility and dependence we bow in reverence and awe and wonder and lord we adore we worship we give thanks to you the living god creator sustainer ruler sovereign

over all that we can come to you in prayer what a privilege what a joy and what a blessing and so lord we ask for your hand to be upon us today that you would come in among us and do us good that lord you would bless to our hearts your word the gospel of god this good news of jesus christ and him crucified we bless you for the hope of the gospel the promise of the gospel the life-giving life-changing impact of the gospel upon hearts and lives and may that be so today may men and women and boys and girls be encouraged by the word and may many who as yet remain unconvinced and unconverted be brought in repentance and faith to jesus christ there to receive from him forgiveness and life everlasting we bless you for this message of life that it is a message that resounds from and brings us to the lord jesus christ and in his name we pray lord that you draw near to us that you would bless us renew us forgive us our sin cleanse us and renew us and all that we ask is in jesus precious name amen well i'm sure everybody boys and girls here if we were to total up the number of trips everyone in here is made on the ferry it would be quite significant we've all been there haven't we many times on the the ferry from you can probably hear remember that the names of the previous ferries going back a number of years and now we have of course a lot seaforth i was on there the other day i want to talk to you talk to you about this i was just on the ferry i think last week we're on there sailing across the minch is like a pond beautiful it always is isn't it there's never a wind in the minch so we tell the visitors and then there were dolphins sightings and the usual scramble to the windows and taking pictures of the sea and as we were crossing over an announcement came on over the tannoy from the captain saying that we're going to run a drill they're informing us as passengers we're going to run a drill on the boat don't worry about it we're going to shut the restaurant while the crew practice their drills at sea fair enough so we get to hear and see a drill being carried out as a passenger quite interesting in fact more than interesting it was quite something and every stage through the drill bing bong on the t on the tannoy on the pa the announcer would say crew to stations bing bong crew to next station bing bong crew to the next and so we were able to follow through what was actually happening and at one point we saw quite a few of the crew gather at this spot on the ferry and they slid open the doors and there were hundreds of life jackets just stacked up perfect okay everything i see of course is perfect everything is stowed away tied down lashed secured perfect and it was just it was just just so nice to see that the precision the care and everything that the crew were doing and that's what struck me and that's what i wanted to share with you today the crew were practicing how to make sure everybody on the boat if they needed to would be kept safe by them the crew that's what they were doing practicing what to do in case of an emergency which is something none of us ever want to experience and those who have experienced it well wow to go through something like that at sea and what was really good to see was the crew going through all their practices so they would know what to do if there was a drama and that's the thing we've just sung today a really well-known psalm 121 i to the hills will lift mine eyes from whence hath come my made what a great question that is who's going to help me said the psalmist as he looked to the strength and hills of the hills and looked at the created world around him said who's going to help me if i get into a crisis or a drama my safety cometh from the lord who heaven and earth hath made now that's quite something the psalm writer was caught up with god's power and wonder the the amazing ability of god to say let there be and there was god is the creator of all things and the psalmist was thankful for that but that's not what he was most thankful for it wasn't that god was the maker of all things it was that god was his keeper that's what really thrilled the psalmist thy foot he'll not let slide nor will he slumber that thee keeps behold he that keeps israel he does not slumber he does not sleep six times in this short song of praise the psalm talks about god being the keeper of his people what a wonderful thing that is just to think about for a few minutes today on a sunday morning the lord thee keeps and then verse 7 the lord shall keep thy soul if you're a christian here today that's your song you can say that the lord is not just your maker he is your keeper he is the keeper of your soul and that crew drill on the lock sea forth a few nights ago seeing them practicing how to make sure everyone would be kept safe on the boat if they were needed that reminded me of this great reality in the psalm we've just sung together that when we put our trust in jesus when we ask the lord into our hearts and confess our sin to him and ask him to forgive us and cleanse us and make us new that's exactly what he does and then we speak of him not just as our maker but our keeper the lord shall keep thy soul this boys and girls is not a message for old people it's not a message just for elders or ministers or or church folk this is a message for you today for everyone on our island and in our country that if we put our trust in jesus he will be our keeper and may he bless us as we look to him but we're going to say together

the words of the lord's prayer as is the congregation's custom and the words are in the bulletin if you would like to use them we say together our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever amen well we'll sing again to god's praise from sing psalms in psalm 18 psalm 18 page 19 in our blue psalm books and we're going to sing in psalm 18 from verse 1 to verse 6 to the tune duke street psalm 18 and sing psalm singing from the beginning i love you lord you are my strength a fortress is the lord to me my rock and my deliverer for refuge to my god i flee he is my stronghold and my shield the lord who saves me by his might i'll call on him and give him praise i'm saved he puts my foes to flight psalm 18 from verse 1 to 6 we'll stand together i love you lord you are my strength a fortress is the lord to me my lord and my deliverer for refuge to my god i flee he is my stronghold and my shield the lord who saves me by his might i'll count my shield, the Lord who saves me by His might.
[13 : 40] I'll call on Him and give Him praise. I've saved He puts my foes to fight.

A portal of death had tumbled me. Destruction hit me like a wave.
Encircled by the stairs of death, I faced the tethers of the cliff.
In my distress I called on God. I cried unto the Lord for it.
He from His temple heard my voice. He listened to the prayer I made.
[14 : 57] Amen. Amen. We'll read together this morning from God's Word from the New Testament.

Two passages. First of all, from the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 17. The Acts of the Apostles. We'll read in chapter 17. And then we'll turn forward in our Bibles to read in 1 Thessalonians. And the first chapter. So first of all, Acts in chapter 17, where we read of a part of what we call today the second missionary journey. The gospel has been brought by the small missionary team to Europe.

Paul, Timothy and Silas, and at some point joined by Luke, begin or continue to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Here in chapter 17 we read of what happened when they come to the ancient city of Thessalonica.

Thessalonica. And when we'll read later the letter Paul would write to these new converts. Chapter 17 in Acts. Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

[16 : 08] And Paul went in as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, saying, This Jesus whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. But the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.

And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also. And Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying, There is another king, Jesus. And the people in the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.

And when they had taken money, a security from Jason, and the rest, they let them go. The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

[17 : 18] And when they arrived, they went into the Jewish synagogue. And when we turn forward to 1 Thessalonians, we find in this passage a short, powerful pastoral letter, written a year perhaps later, a number of months later, as far as we can tell, while Paul was ministering in Corinth.

And he writes to the church that he was responsible for founding to encourage them and to stabilize them in their faith as they faced a difficult providence.

And so we read from chapter 1, Paul, Silas, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians and God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace.

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

[18 : 34] You know what kind of men we prove to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Amen. May the Lord bless his word to our hearts, to his name be all the praise. Let's bow in prayer again for a moment together. Our Lord and our God, we bless and praise you this morning that we have opened in our gathering your word.

And we bless you that we are led here to the word that became flesh and dwelt among us, to Jesus Christ the righteous, who came to seek and to save the lost, to call sinners to repentance.

[19 : 53] And so we pray today, Lord, for this time we are together, that you would bless us and do us good, that you would open our hearts and grant us renewed insight and understanding as to the truths of the gospel, these wonderful doctrines of grace, this message of life and forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus.

For we know that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. And we know that he has come to bring us to God, to deliver us from the wrath to come.

What a message, what a hope and what a saviour. And we pray, Lord, this morning that this message would take root in our hearts and lives, shaping us from the inside out, leading us and motivating us to be servants of the living God.

That we, as the Christians in Thessalonica, it would show we have turned to God, to serve him, waiting for the appearing of Jesus Christ, our saviour, your son.

So we pray, Lord, this day, that your message of truth and love and peace would be blessed to our hearts, that as happened in Thessalonica, the word would be blessed here and it would come home to hearts with power and much conviction, blessed of the Holy Spirit, that there would be joy, joy in the proclamation of Christ, joy in receiving Christ, joy in knowing forgiveness of sin.

[21 : 20] We pray, Lord, for your blessing on your word today, that you would watch over and bless the congregation here at this time of change, at this time of a new chapter, beginning with the retirement of James, with James and Donna now moving away from the congregation.

Lord, we pray that your hand would rest upon them and their family. And we pray, Lord, for the ongoing work of the gospel here in the congregation. We pray for Calamurdo and the elders and deacons, the Sunday school teachers, all those who are on tea and coffee rotas, creche rotas, and who run holiday clubs.

The work goes on. And for that, Lord, we praise and thank you that the message of Christ crucified will continue to go forth. And we pray it would go forth with great power and conviction that men and women and boys and girls in Stornoway would come under the sound of the gospel and commit themselves to the Lord, that they would know that salvation in their souls for themselves.

Lord, this we ask, that your hand would be upon the ongoing work of the ministry here in the congregation. We remember today, Lord, the family of Charlie Finlayson.

We pray for Catherine and Rury, and the wider family. We pray, Lord, that your hand would be upon them at this time. And as we reflect on Charlie and his life and witness and service in the congregation, may that be a witness that will continue to speak to many.

[22 : 46] We thank you, Lord, that there are so many who down through the years have served you faithfully in similar ways. And we pray that this great cloud of witnesses would continue to speak to us and that we would draw from them an example to follow, a promise to claim, a race to run, a battle to fight.

And may we do so keeping the focus on our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Lord, at this time as a nation, we too are experiencing change. We have a new government, a new prime minister.

And Lord, we have been inundated these past weeks with promise and counter-promise, claim and counter-claim, manifesto and counter-manifesto. Lord, we've heard it all before.

And yet we see change. And at this time of change, we remember Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

And we pray, Lord, that the certainty of the gospel would take root in hearts and lives at this time of change. We pray, Lord, for our new government, for the prime minister, for the cabinet, for the royal family.

[23 : 57] And that as an establishment, Lord, there would be a sense not just of importance, but a sense of humility, a sense of your goodness and greatness, and that the gospel of grace would change hearts and lives.

We long for the day when we will see men and women taking their place in the public square, unashamed of the gospel, serving Jesus Christ as a bright, shining witness in that capacity. So we pray for Christian MPs, Christian MSPs, and we pray, and long, Lord, for the day where they would, at the heart of government and heart of the legislative process in our land, be hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and be a longing for a knowledge of Christ and him crucified, and an experience of personal salvation.

Remember us, Lord, at this time as a nation, and we pray that your hand would be upon us as this new chapter begins, both here locally and nationally. Lord, we commend all these things to you.

We come to you as the King of kings and Lord of lords. We bring to your petitions our cares, your concerns, and we pray, Lord, today for those known to you, perhaps not known to us, but known to you, who are finding things difficult at this time.

[25 : 11] We pray for those struggling. We pray, Lord, for those who are finding life hard, who are weighed down, who are uncertain, afraid, lonely, anxious, broken.

Lord, we pray above all that they might know that underneath are the everlasting arms. May they know Jesus Christ and him crucified by coming to him in repentance and faith, and may those of your people draw alongside them and share a word in season, and bring, Lord, that offer of life and that promise of peace of heart and mind that passes all understanding.

Hear us, Lord, in these things we pray. Draw near to us. Bless your word to our hearts this morning for forgive our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We'll sing to God's praise once more from the Psalter in Psalm 84.

Psalm 84, we'll sing from the beginning of the Psalm, page 338 in our blue Psalm books, and we're singing to the tune Tramps and Hawkers. Psalm 84, from the beginning, How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me the tabernacles of thy grace, how pleasant, Lord, they be.

My thirsty soul longs vehemently, ye fainst thy courts to see. My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God, for thee. We'll stand and sing together.

[26 : 36] Amen. How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, to me.

The tabernacles of thy grace, how pleasant, Lord, they be.

My thirsty soul longs vehemently, in things I go to see.

My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God, for thee.

Behold, the sparrow findeth out, and house wherein to rest.

[27 : 37] The swallow also for herself hath purchased said, unless.

In thy known altars where she stayed, her young what's forth may bring.

O the almighty Lord of hosts, through heart thy God and King.

O the Lord of hosts, my God and King. may in thy house not dwell, may ever give me praise.

Blessed is the one whose strength thy heart in whose heart are thy ways.

[28 : 36] Who passing flood, obey God's will, heaven to Jacob wells, also the rain that falleth down, that cools with water fills.

angels. There are wonderful words and we, having sung them together, we turn to the second passage we read this morning in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians, letter of the Apostle Paul to this brand new church that he had planted as part of his journeying, what we call today the second missionary journey.

he's left the city by night because of the pressure and opposition of the world around him and now some months later he writes back to them and this is the record we have before us.

And I'd like us to especially notice perhaps in verse 2, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labour of love, your steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 02] I wonder what it is you look for in a church. It's a good question, it's a fair question. I'm sure most of us, if not all, have at some point been on our travels on holiday or in a town or city we're not very familiar with and we've looked for a church to go along to and I wonder in doing so what it is you would look for.

What is it you look for in a church? What is it you would like to see when you walk in? What is it you would like to experience as the worship begins and unfolds?

What would you hope to feel while you were there? And above all perhaps, what would you want to hear from the pulpit during that worship service?

That's the kind of questions that are in the background to this letter. We know from the Acts of the Apostles that Paul and his small team of co-workers brought the gospel to mainland Europe and he travelled from Philippi to Thessalonica to Berea down to Athens and Corinth and Ephesus and overall it seems scholars can piece things together.

They think it was about a three-year period covering about 3,000 miles and we know we park the statistics that what happened above all was the gospel of grace took hold in hearts and lives.

[31 : 22] Everywhere they went there was conversions, there was blessing, churches were planted but no sooner had the light dispelled the darkness than very quickly opposition came and these new churches that we have the letters to Galatians, Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossian church, the church here in Thessalonica, they were brand new churches, church plants in pagan cities full of darkness and mysticism and pluralism and paganism, emperor worship was a thing and if you didn't take some spice and sprinkle it on the altar and say Caesar is God, you'd be instantly branded as some kind of lunatic, an atheist, an outcast, someone to be watched, a troublemaker, some kind of insurgent.

So that was what Christians had to accept right from the off. And we read through Acts 17 and we read it for a purpose because we read there the founding of this church that Paul is now writing to, these words, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, your labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What do you look for in a church? This is what the apostle Paul was looking for. And to see if these things were there, what he did was he sent Timothy back.

As we piece things together in the Acts of the Apostles and we read through this letter, chapter 3 tells us we could bear it no longer, chapter 3, verse 1, we were willing to be left alone at Athens and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, why?

To establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions. This church had known the blessing of God Almighty, but also they had already tasted the enmity and opposition and intolerance of the world.

[33 : 16] The apostle had to leave Thessalonica under the cover of darkness. That's what chapter 17 in Acts tells us. There was such an uproar and the riot and the threat and the threat of violence was so real in the air that the brothers in chapter 17 and verse 10 sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.

They had arrived in the daytime as far as we can tell, but such was the opposition and enmity and hatred they'd experienced that they had to leave under the cover of darkness. They moved on to Berea and then were told that the Jewish people in Thessalonica heard he was at work in Berea and they came there and stirred up the crowd as well.

So in Thessalonica there was real danger and violence and threat and opposition. Paul knew it. And some months later down in Corinth when he could take it no longer, chapter 3, we could bear it no longer.

He couldn't take it anymore. He couldn't take the worry, the anxiety, the care he felt for these people and so he sends Timothy and he sends Timothy to a very clear mission. Timothy, travel back up these 300 or so miles to Thessalonica and see if the church has stood the test.

See if they've survived. See if they're growing. Go and see if there's a church of Jesus Christ in Thessalonica. So I'd like us to think about this and what comes out of this background particularly in light of these words here in chapter 1 and verse 3.

[34 : 45] And notice this morning two things. First of all, the motivation behind this letter being Paul's loving concern. There's a loving concern here. To such a degree that he sends Timothy.

He sends his best. He takes Timothy, his right-hand man, and he sends him on a perilous mission on his own by the look of it, back up the Isthmus from Corinth in the south, back up to the north to

Thessalonica.

Which was at the time the provincial capital. It was a city of around, as far as we can tell, 200,000. So the population of ancient Thessalonica was just slightly smaller than modern-day Aberdeen. It's a big ancient city. And in that city, there's a church. There was a church. And Timothy's mission is to go back and see if the church is still there.

That's the interesting background and dynamic. That's the canvas upon which this letter is written. So there's a loving concern here, first of all. We'll look at the loving concern, and then we'll think about the living church that Timothy finds.

[35 : 50] The loving concern that we see in Paul is, first of all, it's expressed in the language that opens a letter to the church of the Thessalonians. He writes to them, identifying them as to where they are, but more importantly, who they are and whose they are.

They are the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace. And then immediately, there's a switch in the language. We thank, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering you before our God and Father. And so he talks about them being the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, who is our God and Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So by the end of verse 3, the language of family is established. There's a bond. And this bond shows and is expressed in Paul's loving concern.

He speaks of them as being one. And with absolute certainty and clarity of thought, as he pens this letter down in Corinth, he reflects on their standing in Christ and their bond through Christ.

[37 : 03] Faith has established a new reality. And that reality is pouring out of Paul's own heart. We give thanks to God always for you, constantly, re-mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father.

He is so concerned for them. He has such a love for them because he was there when he brought the gospel to them. And what was the message? Chapter 17 in Acts tells us the emphasis Paul brought to ancient Thessalonica.

We're told in chapter 17 that he spent three Sabbath days, that's over a period of three weeks as a minimum, explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead saying, this Jesus who might proclaim to you is the Christ.

And so we have Paul emphasizing in a matter of weeks the cross and the resurrection, the death and life of the Lord Jesus Christ and saying, this Jesus who might proclaim to you is the Christ.

He preached Christ crucified. And what happened in response to this message? Some were persuaded, as did a great many of devout Greeks and many of the leading women of the city.

[38 : 24] They were converted because Paul preached Christ. He kept the focus. He was there to tell them not about who he was and what he had achieved.

He didn't go there with a CV as many traveling preachers and philosophers did in his day. Many made itinerant speakers, made their living by holding public classes and lectures.

They would be paid to perform orations and give great declarations of philosophy and mysticism and all sorts of pluralism and paganism. All sorts of things were rebounding around the city at this time.

And many would have thought, oh, here's just another itinerant speaker. Here's another preacher. I wonder what he's got to say. And what he had to say was, this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you is the Christ.

Paul's heart for these people is founded in these words in these few short weeks. As far as we can tell, he had a maximum of just a couple of months, maybe eight weeks, ten weeks with them before he had to flee the city or leave the city, I should say, by the cover of darkness.

[39 : 28] Such was the threat and violence and aggression that the church was now experiencing. And so his loving concern is genuine, he's deep-rooted, he's praying for and really concerned for his fellow believers.

And so it comes to the point down there in Corinth a matter of months later, he can't take the worry anymore, he can't take the concern anymore. He wants to know how they're doing and so he sends Timothy.

He gives him his best. And so Timothy is sent back to encourage, he is sent back to encourage the people, the languages, his co-work, he's sent back to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions for you yourselves.

No, we are destined for this. He doesn't want any Christians sitting there experiencing a difficult providence or a hard time thinking, well, why am I going through this?

Surely Christians are not meant to experience this. And he knows that such is the heart of the human heart that we fall over, don't we, we struggle, we're weak, we give in to temptation and then we get into such a confuddle and we think, well, things should go this way and when they don't go that way, we fall apart and think, well, how can this be?

[40 : 45] Where's God in all of this? And Paul is writing to them to remind them. And the language he uses is remarkable. You yourselves know we are destined for this.

We should experience and anticipate difficulty, hardship, challenge, unsettledness. And so Paul's loving concern is that they would be kept on track.

He knew they'd be experiencing affliction, opposition and frustration. It was all there and he knew that they would be going through it. He knew and was concerned for them that in what they would be experiencing, they would not be blown off course, that they would not crumble and that they would not collapse in themselves, that they would not become obsessed with the hardship they were going through.

And so he says, Timothy, go back and minister to them, pastor to them, look after them and see if the church is standing fast. And he writes, grace to you and peace.

What more could he hope for? What more could we today wish for anyone but grace and peace? And there's a clear way we can apply all of this at this point today.

[42 : 00] We need to pause before thinking about the living church. This loving concern that led to Timothy being sent back on this mission to Thessalonica. If we put ourselves in that position and imagine Timothy coming here, what would Timothy find?

What kind of church would Timothy find if he joined us this morning? We know what he'd be looking for. He found it in Thessalonica. He found a living church, defined here in verse 3 as a church that was set apart by their work of faith, their labor of love and steadfastness of hope.

So here's our challenge by way of application of all of this. If Timothy was to come here, what would he find? Has he spent time moving in amongst you in fellowship and worship and praise and prayer?

What would he find? And then what report would he bring back to the apostle of the church in Stornoway? He'd been sent back to establish and exhort them in their faith, reminding them that they're not exempt difficulty, hardship and setbacks.

How did you get on, Timothy? What's the message? What's the report? Tell me about the church. That's what happened in Corinth when Timothy eventually caught up. Perhaps it seems maybe it wasn't in Athens.

[43 : 22] It was maybe either in Corinth or maybe even in Ephesus. Probably Corinth as we try and piece it together, which isn't always that easy to do. But the report he brought back was crystal clear. Whatever city he re-aligned himself with Paul, whatever they were at that time, he brought back a wonderful report.

A report that gladdened the heart. Chapter 3, verse 6. Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported.

You always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you. There was a description a number of years ago I read of the liner, the old liner, the Queen Mary, that eventually was retired from the transatlantic crossing, was bought by a multi-billionaire over in America and parked up and turned into this five-star luxury hotel complex as part of a massive retail park there over in the States somewhere.

And after a number of years, the ship was inspected. From the outside, the Queen Mary looked absolutely incredible, colossal, this vast luxury liner that famed around the world for the luxurious appointments in the ship as she crossed the Atlantic in the 30s and the 40s.

But when the ship was inspected, it was found to be in utter disrepair. There was all sorts of issues and problems.

[44 : 54] The ship had simply suffered from neglect. It had sat in that docking position and her engines, her systems below the waterline were an absolute catastrophe that was going to cost millions to put right.

The ship had just suffered from neglect. And that's the kind of picture, I think, that we need to take hold of today, that we would not suffer from neglect and that we would not neglect the cause, the

work, the ministry that is to continue here as a congregation among you. Your responsibility and privilege is to serve this community in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That work goes on. And so we need to ensure the focus remains, that the temperature remains high, that the pulse remains strong, and that fellowship and worship and communion go together. Paul's love and concern brings all this out because that's what Timothy found in ancient Thessalonica and our challenge, our responsibility is that we would seek to achieve the same in our day and age, in our setting.

So there's love and concern here. Secondly, of course, there's what Timothy found when he got to Thessalonica. He travelled that 300 or so miles on his own by foot, as far as we can tell, back up to Thessalonica.

[46 : 21] He went back to the site where the church had been founded and what he found there gladdened his heart. And he brought back to Paul a message of joy and thanksgiving.

Timothy in chapter 3 has come to you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. Paul, he would have said, the church has stood the test of time.

The church has not been hold beneath the waterline. The church is good. The church is solid. The church is full of faith and love and hope. So what we find here is a wonderful description or definition, if you like, of a living church.

A church defined by her work of faith. Faith regardless of the opposition. There was love even though there had been frustration. There was hope even though there had been persecution. What is it that this language tells us then of the living church? Your work of faith, your labour of love and steadfastness of hope. These things are all productive.

[47 : 27] There's nothing static. There's nothing formal. There's nothing dull. There's no sense of routine here. This is a dynamic and dedicated and determined picture of a church.

Their faith is producing works. Their love is producing labour. And their hope is producing steadfastness. That's the phrasing goes on.

It's not that their work is then going to lead them to faith. It's the other way around. Their faith is leading them to work. Their love is motivating them to labour. And their hope is leading them to endure with steadfastness.

So then we see that as one writer put it very nicely, he put it this way. Theirs was the dynamic outworking of a life transforming principle.

It's quite something, isn't it? Timothy found here a dynamic outworking of a life transforming principle. What is that principle?

[48 : 26] We find it again in Acts. You may remember the story of when the apostles were arrested and incarcerated and the Sanhedrin were gathering the next day to bring them on trial. But that night an angel came in and released them from prison and said to them, go into the temple and tell the people all the words of this life.

Life. This is what the gospel is. It's life-giving. It's life-changing. It is the promise of life in Christ Jesus. Something Paul himself never forgot.

If you look at 2 Timothy, his final letter written from a prison cell in Rome under the sentence of death, in his first sentence he speaks of the promise of life in Christ Jesus.

Life-giving. Life-transforming. The gospel of grace had done its work in the hearts of these brand new Christians. And Timothy comes in among them and finds things going well.

And he describes it for us here. He defines it, if you like, as a work of faith. Their faith is active. Their faith is producing work amongst them. Faithfulness.

[49 : 40] What is this faithfulness? Take up your cross daily and come after me. And it has a purpose, a very clear purpose. As we grow in grace, as we develop our understanding, as we become more mature in the faith, Paul had a very clear purpose in mind.

He sent Timothy to exhort and encourage them. Why? And he charged them to walk in a manner worthy of God. To walk in a manner worthy of God.

Chapter 2 and verse 12. What a description of the Christian life that is. Have a walk that is worthy of God. That, Christian friends, is our responsibility.

Day in and day out. Especially, perhaps, at a time of change. With James retiring and a vacancy of the senior minister post. Now established. What do we do?

What do you do? You continue the work. You show forth the praises of the one who called you from darkness into his marvelous light. And you seek in doing so to have a walk that is worthy of God.

[50 : 49] And that walk that will be worthy of God will be defined in the language of verse 3 as a faith that produces works, a love that produces a labor, and a hope that produces a steadfastness in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This labor of love is an interesting phrase to think about that for a moment. This labor, it's a word that speaks of difficulty, costly effort. It's not just something that's formality or, oh, well, it's my turn on the rota.

Oh, well, I better go and pick up the phone and phone that. So I haven't seen them in church for a while. There isn't that kind of sense of, well, I think I might do that. No. This labor of love is costly. It's effort. It's endeavor. And the emphasis in the ancient Greek word is actually to labor to the point of exhaustion. Do everything you can. That's what this love is.

This love that is driving these young, brand new Christians in Thessalonica is a love that is the beating heart of the church of Christ on earth. When we turn together to read of this, we can read in 1 Corinthians in chapter 13, a letter that Paul would write four or five years after writing to the Thessalonians.

[52 : 05] And what does he say of love? Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful.

It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

So now, faith, hope, and love abide. But the greatest of these is love. You can almost imagine Paul listening to Timothy's report and saying, yes, Timothy, that's amazing.

They're committed in their faith. Their faith is producing works, but is there love? Is there love? Do they love the Lord? Do they love his cause?

Do they love his people? Do they love the gospel of grace that's changed them? Yes, yes, Paul, their love is bringing them to labor. They're working together almost to the point of exhaustion.

[53 : 09] That's what the love of Christ, when it takes hold in hearts and lives, can result in and should result in. So Paul's question, there's faith, Timothy, oh, that's wonderful.

Is there love? And there was. Your work of faith, your labor of love, and your steadfastness of hope. You see, they loved so much, they labored, they worked, they served together.

Notice that language at the end of chapter one. You turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Here am I, Lord, send me, friends, at a time of vacancy as things progress and come to an end.

Be sure to do all you can. If there's a gap, offer yourself. If there's a need, see to it. Don't think someone else will do it. If you can do it, then do it. Do your bit.

It's the purpose and responsibility of all to do what they can to the furtherance of the gospel, to the betterment of the congregation. Let there be these marks, this faith that produces works.

[54 : 16] This love that produces a labour as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ here. There's lastly this, a steadfastness of hope. That's a word that speaks of endurance and my goodness did they need to endure.

There'd been hardness, there'd been a riot, there'd been beatings, there'd been violence. The missionaries had had to leave under the cover of darkness. Then the Thessalonian Jewish people heard that there was the work of the gospel was happening down the road in Berea.

So they'd get on their horses and they'd go down there and stir up the crowds in Berea. Then they'd have come home to Thessalonica. What would they have done when they came back from Berea?

They'd have gone hunting for Christians. They'd have been looking for the gospel.

They'd have been looking to identify believers in Christ to give them a hard time and to persecute them and continue in their bitter opposition to the gospel. These people needed steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and such was their hope in him that they endured.

They were steadfast. In the New Testament letters we read of hope 58 times. There's a reason for that, isn't there? We have hope.

[55 : 21] Hope in Christ. It's quite interesting how these last few weeks as the election has unfolded that time and time again we've been offered hope and a new promise and a new start and a reset and hope and reignite the flame of hope.

You're hearing all these promises they're tripping off the tongues of politicians. They're taking the language of the Bible. They're taking the language of the New Testament and they're turning it into their they're giving it their particular political colour in order to sound good.

And it does sound good because a message of hope is what we need. But there is no hope like the hope that comes from knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour and friend. And I would hope and pray today friends that knowing him as such has been your experience and joy and comfort. And I hope and pray that you would think today well if Timothy came to visit this church and sat beside me would he would he understand that I'm a Christian? Could I share with Timothy if he visited the church here that I have this faith and hope and love?

Or would he find you unconvinced and unconverted unmoved uncertain still far off in the darkness refusing to come to Christ refusing to bow the knee refusing to acknowledge him as your Lord and saviour and friend.

[56 : 42] I would hope and pray that today friends some of this might resonate with you. John Bunyan who famous writer wrote Pilgrim's Progress said this he said that faith is never ill when hope is well.

What's our hope today? Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever and we look to him for his grace his mercy and peace for his blessing for his sustaining grace for his grace to serve his grace to follow his grace to reach out his grace to continue the ministry in this place as a body of believers as a body of people gathered together to serve this community in his name and may he bless you as you do so.

Thomas Chalmers just to close said this the great leader of the free church in the 19th century eminent preacher and theologian scholar said simply this that faith that remained in the head but did not warm the heart and change lives was of no use to us.

Timothy found the real thing when he went back to Thessalonica he made an assessment and came back to Paul and said Paul the church has stood what are they like Timothy well I found them and defined them in these ways and as he described them Paul wrote I could speak of their work of faith their labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ where we know brothers loved of God he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction may that be our portion today and ongoing that the word of the Lord would come to us in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction that we would be a people with a faith that was dynamic with a love that is devoted with a hope that is determined looking unto Jesus us and may we all today be found doing just that let's pray for a moment together

Lord our God we pray for your blessing today we pray Lord that you would be with us at this time that we might take the word of life the promise of life and that we might take this our saviour into our hearts and lives by acknowledging him as such as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who in his grace and mercy has seen to it again that we have this opportunity to worship and we pray while we are on mercy's ground that we would respond accordingly that we would respond in faith that we would serve in love that we would endure in hope looking unto Jesus day by day be with us Lord in these things we pray for Jesus sake Amen We'll turn to sing Psalms and we'll sing from

[59 : 54] Psalm 57 Psalm 57 and we'll sing from verse 7 Psalm 57 page 75 in our blue psalm books we'll sing from verse 7 to the end to the tune Dennis Psalm 57 from sing Psalms from verse 7 my heart is steadfast Lord with music I will sing awake my soul wake harp and lyre my song the dawn will bring Psalm 57 verses 7 to 11 we'll stand to sing and if you just take your seats for a few minutes after the benediction that would be appreciated Psalm 57 we'll stand and sing my heart is steadfast Lord with you sing

I will sing awake my soul wake harp and lie my song the dawn will ring among the nations Lord to you I will give praise among among the peoples of the earth my songs of you I'll raise praise praise praise your steadfast love which reaches to the sky your most unfaithfulness will

O God exalted God exalted me, and over all the earth below display your majesty.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

I just wanted to read very briefly a couple of sentences that for many, many years have been put together to encourage congregations at a time of vacancy and change.

[63 : 10] Let me just read to you a few snippets from this. As a congregation, you are entrusted with the responsibility of choosing a pastor to be over you in the Lord. Each of you have a duty to take your proper part in this responsibility.

In this time of vacancy, we look to the Lord in humility and dependence. It's an extremely important time for you as a congregation, who by definition are a group of people associated together for the

furtherance of the gospel of Christ in your community.

The filling of a vacancy is to be conducted in a spirit worthy of the religion you profess, worthy of Christ in whose name you are associated, and in such a way as to foster unity and brotherly love. That is sound, sound advice. And may the Lord grant wisdom, discernment, patience and unity of purpose in going forward, for the work of the gospel goes on.

Ministry, rotas, clubs, meetings, services, communions. In all of this, I assure you that the prayers of the Presbytery and the wider church are with you. May the Lord grant our prayers for guidance going forward.

[64 : 24] Thank you for your time today. I'll just pop to the side door. Thank you. Thank you.