

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
January 21, 2018

Pastor Jasper Sellnow  
Mount Olive Lutheran Church

Theme: Stand firm in the Word  
Text: **2 Thessalonians 2:13-17**

**<sup>13</sup> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.**

**<sup>16</sup> May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, <sup>17</sup> encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.**

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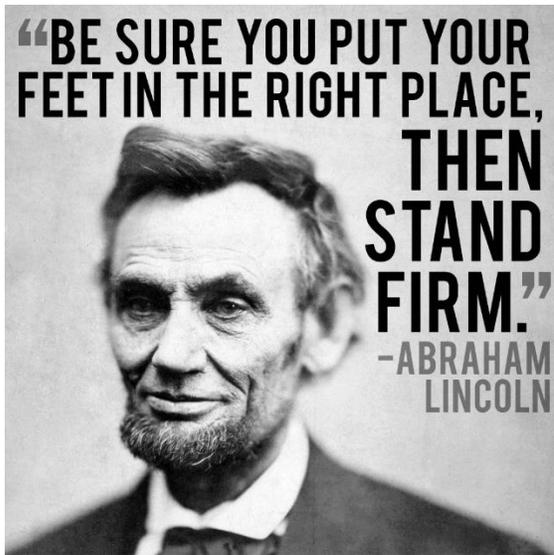
The Word of God we'll consider today is our lesson from 2 Thessalonians. Let's begin with prayer:

*From eternity, O God, In your Son you did elect me. Therefore, Father, on life's road Graciously to heav'n direct me; Send to me your Holy Spirit That his gifts I may inherit. And may Christ my Lord and Savior, Be my life and love forever. Amen. (Christian Worship hymn 461 vs. 1 & 4 alt.)*

On February 20<sup>th</sup> of 1862 Willie Lincoln, the eleven-year-old son of President Abraham Lincoln, died of Typhoid fever. This wasn't the first time the Lincoln's had experienced this kind of grief. Twelve years earlier their second son, Edward, had died at the age of five. But the death of Willie seemed to be too much to bear. And so Abraham Lincoln asked for a nurse to be brought to the White House to attend not only to their youngest son, Tad, who was also sick, but to tend as well to Mary Todd who was in a very dark place following the death of her son.

And so the chief army nurse selected a widowed army nurse named Rebecca Pomroy for the job. She was brought to the White House and introduced to the president. And as he asked her a little about herself he discovered she was a widow who had lost two children of her own. A biographer for Lincoln reports that as she told him of her story, and of God's love and care for her through it all, the President covered his face with his hands and tears streamed through his fingers.

Lincoln's biographer also recorded another interaction between the two shortly after their meeting. Nurse Pomroy was being brought back to the White House from the College hospital where she worked in town... and the carriage she was in became stuck in the mud because of a storm the night before. The President himself actually came to her aid and laid down some large stones in the mud to get her from the carriage over to the sidewalk. And he was reported to have told her: *Now, Mrs. Pomroy, if you will please put your feet just as I tell you, you can reach the sidewalk in safety.* And after helping her to the sidewalk he looked at her and said: *All through life, be sure and put your feet in the right place, and then stand firm.*



Rebecca Pomroy wound up serving the first family off and on throughout the year ahead. And it seems that during this bitter time in his life, Abraham Lincoln's faith in God was perhaps rekindled, in part due to Rebecca Pomroy. Now whether or not the President's quote about standing firm came from a heart of faith, it certainly expresses a truth that we can appropriate and appreciate as Christians.

God often tells his people to "Stand firm." And yet we recognize that if we want to stand firm we need to stand in the right place. And God tells us exactly where that is... in our sermon text in fact we find both the encouragement to stand and the ground to stand upon as God encourages us to **Stand firm in the Word.**



It was the apostle Paul who wrote these words by inspiration to a congregation he'd served for a short time in the Greek city of Thessalonica. And as Paul closed his final letter to these believers

he offered a word of thanks to God and a word of encouragement for the people. First the word of thanks: **But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13).**

Paul had spent much of this letter talking about those who were causing the Thessalonians trouble. But here he shifts gears and reminds the people that it's not all bad news here on earth. In fact, the people he served were evidence of this. Others might oppose the gospel and persecute God's people, but Paul could thank God because of his saving work among the Thessalonians. These were people loved by the Lord. And Paul knew this because God had chosen them before they were born to be his own... and then God had made them holy as the Spirit worked faith in the truth in their hearts and minds.

Paul was a pastor. And pastors thank God because he is the one who chooses, and redeems, and calls his people. I certainly thank God for doing the same for you. All of your pastors do. But you don't have to be a pastor to thank God for your fellow Christians, we can all rejoice that God has shown such love and mercy to others and has surrounded us with brothers and sisters who we get to grow and serve with here on earth. And who, one day, we will get to share eternity with.

But it's not just eternity we'll share! Paul went on to say: **He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:14).** What God planned in eternity – that you would be a part of his family – and then secured in time through the saving work of his Son Jesus Christ... this is what God has also called you to in your life as the Spirit has worked through the saving message of the gospel. This was the good news Paul preached and wrote throughout his ministry. It's the same message your pastors preach and teach and share with you today whether written down or in person. And this good news that you have a Savior from sin... that you have forgiveness for all you've done... that you have a God who loved you before this world began and made sure you'd be a part of his forever family... this good news changes not just your status and standing in this life... it changes your eternity! Because not only will you share eternity with other believers and with Jesus Christ himself, you will get to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I can't even begin to imagine what that will be like... The honor and splendor and might and majesty of our Savior... this he chooses to share with us!? What an unfathomable thing... What else can you do... what else could Paul or any pastor do... than thank God for this amazing love shown to his people and promised to his people.

But as I mentioned, not only does Paul offer a word of thanks to God here... he also offers a word of encouragement then to the people in this closing address of his. After thanking God – and really inviting them to marvel with him at God's grace – Paul offers this conclusion: **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. (2 Thessalonians 2:15).**

Paul had just reminded them of God's great love for them, and his great hope was that they would continue to be reminded of that love and because of it stand firm no matter what tried to knock them over in life. But as Abraham Lincoln said... before you stand firm you'd better be

sure your feet are in the right place. And Paul makes that crystal clear. **Stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. (2 Thessalonians 2:15).** Paul's encouragement was simple: Stand firm in the Word. The Word of God proclaimed by us among you and the Word of God written to you in our letters. Stand firm in that Word.

And dear friends not only is that my encouragement for each of you today... it is the same thing all your pastors hope for. More than that, this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus – to stand firmly in the promises of God's Word. And ultimately that's what this section of God's Word helps us to see... All of this – the pastor's thanks to God and encouragement for his people – it's all the result of the Word of God... the teachings that have been handed down from God to man, and from one generation of people to the next since the very beginning.

And what an amazing thing that our God entrusts his holy Word into our hands... the hands of sinners, so that we can share it with other sinners and show one another the only place where our hope of salvation is found. In another of Paul's letters he wrote: **continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15).**

We've been given the truth from caring Christians... mothers, fathers, grandparents, pastors, teachers... but we're not convinced of its truth just because of this... we've been convinced by the Scriptures themselves... The God of the Bible is at work when his Word is read and proclaimed... and so we find what the Scriptures say about themselves then to be true: **The word of God is living and active. (Hebrews 4:12).** And the gospel is indeed **the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16).** And it is in the Word where God comes to you to **encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:17).** God will equip you for a life of faithful service while you march toward the heaven that is already yours because of Jesus... and all along that journey he will offer his free forgiveness to keep you in his fold and raise you back up when you stumble.

Perhaps you can see why Paul's last message to his people in Thessalonica would include the words of our sermon text and this encouragement to Stand firm in the Word... Ultimately this is the greatest encouragement one Christian can give to another.

And as I leave you today to go serve the Lord in another place, allow me to leave you with this same encouragement. Stand firm in the Word. Because the Word of God is the only place you will ever hear the truth about yourself and the truth about God. It is in the Word that you see God had a plan for you before you were even born. In the Word you see that he chose you before time began. In the Word you see how God, in time, carried out your salvation... in the Word we see God send his Son Jesus. In the Word we see Jesus born as a man. In the Word we see Jesus live as our substitute. In the Word we see Jesus' perfect life. In the Word we witness his suffering and death on the cross. In the Word we hear the angels announce: "He is not here. He is risen!" It is in the Word we see Jesus ascend to glory in heaven... a glory we will all soon share with him. Dear friends, it's in the Word we hear this great good news: that though we are fallen and false and full of sin – we have a Savior who has taken away our guilt, our shame, and our eternal punishment. Yes, in the Word we hear the truth that sets us free.

There is no better thing I can leave you with than to direct you back to the Word... again, and again, and again. Stand firm in the Word brothers and sisters. When Satan's lies and empty temptations plague you – stand firm in the Word. When that wretched liar and your sinful flesh accuse and condemn you – stand firm in the Word. When your personal life is a wreck – stand firm in the Word. When your family is falling apart... when your health fails... when death draws near – stand firm in the Word. Stand firm knowing you are loved... chosen... redeemed... called... that you are set on a path toward glory. Be confident of these things! Why? Because God says so in his Word.

**So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. And may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. (2 Thessalonians 2:13).**