



Who Comes First? Live A Life Worthy Of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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A few weeks back I was at the grocery store after work. I knew the store was packed with people because I had to park in the back of the lot. If you have ever been to the store between five and six pm during the week then you know just how busy it can be. People pushing carts clogged the aisles, making it difficult to get to from one part of the store to the other. A dropped jar of spaghetti sauce closed another. The line at the meat counter seemed to stretch from one end of the store to the other side. There is always that one slow, s.l.o.w. cart pusher who is almost impossible to overtake. Finally, after navigating a moving maze I got what I needed, and headed to the checkout lanes.

Every checkout lane was open and there were still stacks and stacks of people waiting to pay for their groceries. The express lanes seemed to have people with more than 12 items in their baskets. The regular lanes were filled by shoppers with cart overflowing with food stuffs. The wait was going to be forever and the poor lady in front of me only had a tube of toothpaste to buy. She had only one item and I was certain she was going to be waiting in line for eternity. But that is not what happened. The shopper in front of her saw that she only had one thing to buy. She politely motioned to the woman with toothpaste to move in front of her and said to her “Oh, you only have that. Please go in front of me. I have more than I am supposed in this lane.” It didn’t take as long for her to checkout as I thought it would.

That kind of courtesy might seem like a little thing, but it flies in the face of what our culture tells us to prioritize. In the eyes of the world the most important person is me; me first, and me always. Horace, the Latin poet made the prioritization of self clear when he wrote “Carpe Diem” seize the day. What he meant by that phrase is that a person should do what they want when they want. In other words, the most important

thing in life is me and I should always come first. Forget about tomorrow and instead, do what you want today. Sometimes we think and act that way without even realizing it. Someone zips in front of another car to make sure they get through the light. People line up at three pm on Thanksgiving day so that they can be the first to push through the store doors for the Black Friday sales. People grab an extra slice of pizza even though they aren't hungry, but, because they don't want to be shortchanged. People chatter on about what they've done and accomplished without listening to their friends and family share about how their day was. People focus on themselves and that worldview, that way of thinking, is reinforced by our culture, Carpe Diem! Or for people of a certain generation, YOLO.

How rare is it that someone in line at the grocery store waves someone else ahead of them? That kind self sacrifice might seem like a little thing, but it is exactly the point being made in verse 12 of 1 Thessalonians 2 "lead a life worthy of God." To lead a life worthy of God means our focus isn't inward, always placing us first. Rather, our focus is on God and what God has called us to: purity, uprightness, and blamelessness (vs. 10). Instead of seizing the day and placing ourselves first, we place God first. We seek first the kingdom of God and that means we look for those who need help and we extend a generous hand. We listen for those who lament and we attune our ears to their cries. We journey with those who are struggling and we share God's gifts with them. We search for the broken and we work towards healing with them. We identify systems of injustice and we strive to right the wrongs committed. As Christians, we lead a life worthy of God and that life is visible by the things we do for and with one another, our selfless acts.

So we respond to God's call by determining to lead lives of selflessness, always pressing on towards the goal of purity, uprightness, and blamelessness. Our determination, unfortunately is never enough. No matter how strong we are, no matter how hard we work at placing God before all things and other people before us, we can't do it perfectly. We are human and to be human means we are broken. Sin has disrupted the way we see life and interact with one another. It is as if we have glasses on, but the problem with our glasses is that they are the wrong prescription. Our view of the world

is distorted, causing us act in selfish ways, so we try skip a spot in checkout lane because we just want to get home. However, the glasses we wear are corrected to the proper prescription in Jesus Christ. Through the lens of Christ we see the world as it is and by the power of God's word at work in us we place God first.

Despite our brokenness, often seeing the world through the lenses of selfishness, God's word is at work in us, empowering us to act for others not ourselves, helping us to tend to one another with the gentle care of a nurse. To place God and others before us is counter to what the world says we ought to be doing with our lives. As Christians we lead a life worthy of God, which is inherently counter cultural. We let the lady with the single tube of toothpaste go before us because God has called us to see the world through his eyes, selfless eyes. We don't do this alone. God's word at work in us: shaping us, empowering us, directing us, and changing us. In the eyes of Christians the most important person is Jesus Christ; Jesus first, and Jesus always.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.