

Sunday 6 September, 2020
Mending the mess

Milford Baptist

Life isn't easy is it?

There are forces from outside of us that make it challenging.
There are forces within us that make it challenging.

The reality is that life is not straight forward,
Not plain sailing,
Not a piece of cake,
Not child's play.

Rather, it is often complicated, difficult, tough, demanding,
And, let's face it, we muck up,
We make a mess.
So today we think about mending the mess.

Not too many of us are going to argue with the idea
that the world at the moment is in a bit of a mess.

We live with family, and we weren't too far into the 2020 school year
when we got newsletters back from school.

This one was not the usual warning about lice
possibly infecting people's scalps,
creating an irritating itch
So buy special shampoo to wash the kid's hair.

It was about a virus possibly infecting people's bodies
creating a serious threat to health and life.
So we were to buy soap and hand sanitizer to wash our hands.

We all know that the whole world has changed in the last 8 months.
Changed in ways we would never have anticipated
Or even imagined.
Our world is in a mess.

We are using Paul's letters to the Thessalonians
for our scripture this morning.

The church in Thessalonica had been disturbed and unsettled
by teachers with wrong ideas about the 'end of time'

The end of time has been foretold and forewarned
since the first human beings managed to get their heads
around the concept of "time."

And while end-of-time predictions and scenarios
have changed throughout the centuries,
the headline has always been the same:
it's bad news.

And this year we have been bombarded with bad news.
The corona virus has taken over our news and our thoughts.

On Thursday when I was writing this
there were 22.5 million confirmed covid cases
858000 confirmed deaths.
It's all bad news!

Can you think of one example in history
of a newspaper headline that reads
"Things are just keep getting better and better" or
"Everything is perfect and heaven is here."

This pandemic has reminded us how vulnerable we are
to forces outside our control.
It creates fear.

Fear that can paralyze our personal sense of purpose.

Fears that can bring an atmosphere of hopelessness and helplessness
to everyday existence.

Someone has written:

“When fear becomes so powerful,
“The FUD Factor”

becomes the driving force in our daily lives.

What does FUD stand for?

It stands for Fear-Uncertainty-Doubt.

The writer quoted goes on to say that the FUD factor
has given birth to a number of FUD clubs
where people gather to wring their hands
about how awful things are, and how bad things are getting.

1) The FUD CLUB of overpopulation.

The world’s population is growing
by over 11 million every week.

That’s about twice the population of NZ.

Where are we going to put them? Join this FUD CLUB.

2) The FUD CLUB of environmental degradation.

Wiping out rainforests,

-using up our dwindling supply of fresh water,

Polluting the oceans with plastic,

Join this FUD club

3) The FUD CLUB of Global Warming.

An Earth smothered to death by green-house gases

and heated up into a Hades,

is another apocalyptic nightmare.

the specter of rising sea levels, melting polar caps,

expanding drought, and out-of-control fires,

join this FUD club

Our writer goes on to say:

Unlike Cold War fears that just one finger on one button
could end the world by starting a nuclear war,

Hot World fears are fueled by our daily reaching out
for a “good life” that we seem unable to check or control.”

Yes – it’s pretty obvious that our world is in a mess.

But Paul shows,

by his instructions on how the Thessalonians should be living,
that the church can be a bit of a mess too.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

*¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters,
warn those who are idle and disruptive,
encourage the disheartened,
help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

*¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong,
but always strive to do what is good for each other
and for everyone else.*

*¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually,
¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

I wonder if any of you were a bit like me
and actually enjoyed one aspect of lockdown
– no work you had to do!!
No meetings you had to go to.
It was quite nice being lazy,
and not even feeling guilty about it!

One person said:

“I don’t mind going to work,
but that 8-hour wait to go home is awful!”

“Hard work may not kill me,” another said, “but why take a chance?”

And yet another

“A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining,
the breeze is blowing,
the birds are singing
and the lawn mower is broken.”

St. Paul had difficulty with the church at Thessalonica.

Some of the members were refusing
to do their share of the work.

These people were not busy; they were busybodies

What do you do with people who refuse to do their share of the work?

It's true in every organization.

Some people do not do their share.

Indira Gandhi, one of India's past prime ministers, once said,

“There are two kinds of people, those who do the work
and those who take the credit.

Try to be in the first group - there is less competition.”

So some people in Thessalonica were faithful at work serving Christ,
and others were not.

Oh, this group had many good excuses.

Some of them looked down on plain everyday work
because of their upbringing.

Some of those from Jewish backgrounds, for example,
believed in hard work . . .

but they believed that spiritual work was superior to physical work.

They believed that only those who studied Scripture like the scribes
were doing really worthy work,

but not those who did manual labor.

Some of those from Greek backgrounds didn't like to work, either . . .
they felt it demeaning, and left most of their work
to their slaves and servants.

And then there were some from the Thessalonian congregation
who believed work was no longer necessary
because Jesus was going to return any moment.

They had many excuses for not working . . .
I'm not sure that it is that different today.

Churches can be an example of Pareto's principle
that 20% of people do 80% of the work.
It's human nature.

Does Milford fit that pattern?
To those of you who work hard for your church
and I'm sure there are many of you,
'Thank you.'

I find this quote from Rick Warren challenges me
"Do you know what the worst sin is for Christians?
It is not adultery. It is not murder.
It is not some sort of sexual perversion.

God tells us in Revelation 3. He says it's 'lukewarmness.'
No passion." These people have the attitude that
"God is just one of the things in my life.
I have my social life and my career life and my sexual life
and my family life
and over here is a little piece of the pie called church.

God says, 'How dare you! I love you this much.
I love you passionately.

I made you, created you, planned you,
purposed you, saved you, have a place for you in heaven,
and you would treat that with half-hearted indifference saying,

Excuse me but there's a good TV show on tonight.'

“Jesus says, ‘I’d rather have you hot or cold.
Lukewarmness makes me sick to my stomach.’”

Certain members of the church at Thessalonica, like any church,
were guilty of “lukewarmness.”

They were refusing to carry their share in carrying out
the mission of the church.

Even worse, some of these lukewarm Christians
brought a negative spirit into the fellowship.

They were not only idle, but they criticized
those who did work.

Paul called these negative idlers, busybodies.
And Paul had little use for these people.
They did more harm than good.

Another writer summarises:

“They had time on their hands and gossip on their lips . . .”

Chuck Swindoll says,

“There’s a vast difference between
putting your nose in other people’s business
and putting your heart into their problems.”

I think perhaps the most destructive attack on the church
is the attack of negativity.

In my experience,

Home-groups can become little huddles of negativity,
and you can almost guarantee that most of the participants
won’t be in the church 3 years later,
and tragically some won’t be in any church.

Individuals can be depressingly negative.

At one church I pastored one of the members was so negative
he couldn't even be positive without being negative.

He really enjoyed a communion service
we did differently one evening and instead of saying
“thank you, I enjoyed that service”
he said

“I've been waiting years for a service like that!”

When you get a new Pastor here at Milford,
Know this for sure,
One thing that will burn out
-even destroy –
a Pastor or leader
is criticism.

What will feed their emotional tank,
Build them up and strengthen their ministry
is encouragement.

We've already read this”

¹⁴ *we urge you, brothers and sisters,
warn those who are idle and disruptive,
encourage the disheartened,
help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

You have faithful people here in the church at Milford
Who are putting time, effort, prayer and gifting
into leading and serving you.
Please make sure you encourage them.

Too many believers at Thessalonica had become idle busybodies,
poking themselves into other people's affairs,
gossiping, and spreading all kinds of talk and rumours.

Why? Because it is easier to be a busybody
than it is to minister to the needs of those within the community
who are hurting, lonely, desperate, dying, and lost.

But that is what Jesus calls us to do.

One Pastor has suggested that Jesus wants us to “go M.A.D.”

M. A. D.

Don't look for that in the original Greek.

M.A.D. is an acrostic.

Jesus wants us to go and “Make A Difference”

It's absolutely true that if you make a constructive difference
in people's lives, you won't have time to be a negative busybody.

I read a report on a youth mission trip to Jamaica which included this:

On their trip they visited one of the local elementary schools,
and they spent some time observing in a classroom
seriously overcrowded with children,
most of them very poor, all of them needy
and wiggly and noisy and unruly.

It was a difficult, sometimes even chaotic, learning environment;
but the youth group marvelled to see that the teacher
carried herself with great calm and patience,
treating all of the children with love and respect,
despite the poverty and the chaos.

They decided that the only way she could do this
was that she must really love being a teacher.

But they were surprised to hear her say,
"Oh, I don't come here every day mainly because I love teaching.
I come here every day because I love Jesus,
and I see Jesus in every one of these children."

So we come to another passage from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.

This one encourages us to fix the mess

it is from the second letter, chapter 2 verses 13-17

13 As for us, we can't help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that God chose you to be among the first^[a] to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth.

14 He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 With all these things in mind, dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and keep a strong grip on the teaching we passed on to you both in person and by letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope,
17 comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.

They were to depend on the salvation they had experienced.

- Their deliverance from slavery to sin and death, through the Holy Spirit who works in them to make them holy.

Standing on that foundation

Paul wants them to stand firm.

We too are to stand firm,

Standing on the knowledge of our deliverance,
 and on the fact that we are:
 loved by the Father and by Jesus,
 called by God
 who, by His grace,
 gives us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope,
 and strengthens us to serve him.

So we don't need to subscribe to any FUD philosophy,.
 We don't need to be consumed, or even distracted,
 By Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt.

Rather we are to go MAD
 Every day, in every task and in every relationship

We are to Make A Difference.

No FUD

Go MAD

Know GOD

G stands for Grace.

God gives to us His grace
 Forgiveness we don't deserve or earn,
 Comfort we don't deserve or earn,
 Strength we don't deserve or earn.

May we know God's grace.

O stands for Optimism.
 We mend the mess by being optimistic,
 Not being pessimistic or negative,
 But seeing the best in every situation, and in every person.

An American father who was saying goodbye to his son
who was moving to another city to attend university
wrote down 511 observations and suggestions
to help him survive and flourish.

Here are just a few.

“Compliment three people everyday . .
. . Stop blaming others .
. . Eat prunes . .
. . Lend only those books you never care to see again . . .”

“Spend less time worrying who’s right,
and more time deciding what is right . .

. . Keep secrets . .
. Remember that all news is biased . .

. Just to see how it feels,
for the next 24 hours refrain from
criticizing anybody for anything .

. . Don’t use time or words carelessly. Neither can be retrieved.

Don’t gossip.”

Wise advice from a wise father.

Have you heard the story of a traveller
who approached the gates of an ancient city.

The gatekeeper sat quietly, and listened as the traveller announced
that he had left his old city and was looking
for a new city in which to live.

“What’s this city like?” asked the traveller.

“What was your old city like?” returned the gatekeeper.

“It was terrible. People were mean and unfriendly.

There were no jobs.

The government was an abomination, and the taxes onerous.”

“Well, that’s pretty much what you’ll find here,”
admitted the gatekeeper.

So the traveller moved on in search of a better city.

A few hours later another traveller approached
with a heavy load on his horse.

He also announced he was seeking a new home.

“What was it like in the town you came from?”
enquired the gatekeeper.

“It was wonderful.

Filled with lovely people who were always there to help you.
Even the politicians tried their best to do their best for the citizens.

I wish I didn’t have to leave on account of my job.”

“Well, that’s pretty much what you’ll find here,”
reported the gatekeeper.

So the man entered the city.

People who see the best in situations and people
-people who are optimistic spread optimism,
thankfulness and joy.

We can’t possibly drown in pessimism if we follow
Paul emphasis that we are to be thankful
and we are to be joyful.

O stands for Optimism

And D stands for Deliverance.

We have been delivered from the punishment for sin,
We have been delivered from the power of sin,
We have been delivered from despair and given hope.

So we can stand firm, and mend the mess that others,
- Or maybe even we -
have made.

So here is the summary of my sermon.

Remember - NO FUD

Remember - GO MAD

Remember - KNOW GOD.

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who loved us and by his grace gave us
eternal comfort and a wonderful hope,
comfort you and strengthen you
in every good thing you do and say.*