

Ready or not

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

November 14, 2010

(Play music video: "Ready or Not" by Ashley Cleveland;
music video by Tim Ensworth)

Are you going somewhere? Are you on your way? Are you gonna swing and sway?

*I want you to be on your way on the road less taken
While the news is breaking, be on your way
For the chance worth taking
For the stand worth making
Be on your way*

*Because under the barrel you cannot see the light
Shining on the pilgrims going somewhere
Along with the peril comes joy and delight
Bathing every pilgrim that's going somewhere*

Are you going somewhere? Are you on your way? Are you gonna swing and sway? Or are you just too tired? Too tired to get up? Too tired to go anywhere? Too tired to be bothered?

I'm getting too old for this ... It's somebody else's turn ... I've already been there and done that ... Not today ... Not this year ...

Are you just too tired? It's a good question to ask -- anytime -- but especially today. Because today is Stewardship Sunday, the day you and I will make, or not make, specific commitments of money to fund the ministries and mission of this church for the coming year. These commitments are vital to who we are and what we do. They empower ideas and creativity in music and drama and worship. They enable ministries of hospitality and help and healing. They allow us take care of each other in meaningful ways, within this church family and in the wider community and in the world through our giving to United Church of Christ mission programs.

What we choose to give matters, because money is the fuel that takes us where we want to go. But what we choose to give matters even more because it is a symbol of our broader commitment, the commitment of our very selves, to be on our way together, to go as a congregation of Christians to wherever God intends to lead us.

Church is not an institution we support. Church is not an event we attend. We are the church. We are the body of Christ, which is to say that Christ lives in us and with us and through us

Under his control, all the different parts of the body fit together ... and when every part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.

When every part works as it should ... The body needs every one of its parts. The body needs you. We need you. You matter.

Will the body build itself up or will it slowly waste away? Will we be eager and productive or listless and lazy? Will what we do together make a difference or will the church be beside the point? Are we going somewhere or are we just marking time, spinning our wheels, dead in the water? Ask yourself: are you ready to swing and sway, or are you just too tired?

My friends, you must not become tired of doing good ...

You must not become tired of doing good! That's what the apostle Paul wrote to the men and women of the church in Thessalonica. And that's what I am saying today ... to me. That's what I'm saying today to me and to you. We must not become tired of doing good. It needs to be said, because sometimes we do become tired.

Sometimes we grow tired of doing good because it doesn't seem to do any good. The world goes on, much as it always has, much, as it seems, it always will. Bitter enemies remain bitter enemies. The poor remain poor. There are always more people who are hungry or abused or beset by calamity. The earth will spin forward toward its destiny surely regardless of what I do or don't do.

Can one person really make a difference? Does what I do or what I don't do really matter?

Sometimes we become tired of doing good because we feel unappreciated. We don't do it for the reward. We don't do it for the recognition. But it's nice to be noticed. It's nice to be thanked.

We work hard, we make sacrifices, we take pains to put everybody else's needs ahead of our own, but they hardly notice. They take it for granted. Maybe if I just stopped doing everything for everybody else, maybe if I took back my time, kept back my money for myself, maybe then they'd notice! Let's see how they do without me!

Sometimes we grow tired of doing good because we feel like we're doing it all by ourselves. It always falls on me! Who else is stepping up to the plate? Who else is doing their fair share?

Maybe if I had some help, maybe if somebody else would pick up the ball once in a while, I'd have more energy, I'd have more desire to keep on, but right now, I'm just burned out. It's somebody else's turn.

Sometimes we become tired of doing good because it costs us too much. The physical and emotional price we have to pay is just too steep. You try to help people who don't want to be helped or don't seem to care. You butt up against people who have vested interests in the status quo and don't want anybody rocking the boat. The more you give the more you are asked to give.

And the truth is that when you do try to do good, you put yourself in the way of evil. You put yourself in the way of powerful and malevolent forces that continue to plague our human race: greed and pride and hatred and envy and cruelty and apathy. It's easier just to stay out of it. It's easier not to get involved. It's easier just to live and let live. It's easier not to pay the price, not to take the risk.

Sometimes we grow tired of doing good because it's just one more obligation, one more thing we have to do. It's like going to the dentist or paying your taxes or going to work. It's nice when it's over and done with. It's nice when Friday night rolls around and we can do what we want.

But what if you love your work? What if doing good were not merely a duty, but a privilege, a pleasure, a source of joy? Then would you grow tired of it?

But mostly, I think, we become tired of doing good because we rely on our own strength. And our strength and resolve and endurance get used up, even the best among us, even the strongest among us.

*Even those who are young grow weak;
young people can fall exhausted.
But those who trust in the Lord for help
will find their strength renewed.*

We need you. You matter. What you do does make a difference. But neither we nor this world nor God depend on you. We and this world and all of creation, and you, depend on the Lord. And the Lord will give you strength and resolve and endurance and rest.

*[You] will run and not get weary;
[you] will walk and not grow weak.*

When you put your trust in the Lord, when you rely on the Lord for strength,
you won't become tired of doing good.

So be on your way! Be on your way, regardless of your reservations, regardless
of your doubts, regardless of your concerns about the cost, ready or not.

Be on your way! Because under the barrel you cannot see the light shining on
the pilgrims going somewhere!

Be on your way! Because along with the peril comes joy and delight bathing
every pilgrim that's going somewhere!

Let's be on our way! Let's go somewhere!