

*"In Dubio, Pro Tradito (When in Doubt, Hold Fast to Tradition)"*

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur (Disciples of Christ),  
Georgia

Season of Pentecost, All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2015

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Scriptures: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

*As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.*

*<sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. <sup>4</sup> He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?*

*<sup>13</sup> But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our [Creator], who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.*

In the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church in Thessaloniki he makes two key points in this section.

*As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.*

People are going to try to frighten or confuse you  
or get you all alarmed about the Day of the Lord.  
Don't be shaken or alarmed to that effect.

Instead stand firm in the faith that the God you know and follow  
is a Lord of love, not of fear, of hope, not despair.  
If grace is true we will all be saved.  
If love is real we will all be transformed and changed into the fullness  
of our beauty.  
If hope is alive and so close we can touch it, what have we got to  
fear?

To a people surrounded by fear-mongers and naysayers Paul says  
stand your ground.  
Be steadfast.  
Be faithful.  
To be steadfast is to endure with fidelity, with unwavering  
faithfulness.  
Endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness  
are continually lifted up as positive Christian attributes.  
These are traits that we value as people of faith.  
Here in Christ's Church  
we affirm and aspire to attain and adhere these basic tenets.

At the same time,  
we recognize that sometimes we fall short of these goals,  
and when we do so we need to re-group,  
collect ourselves, and pray for a fresh start.  
When, you might ask, is a good time to petition God and one another  
for the energy, vision and faith to start afresh... why not  
now?

And then Paul goes on to share with the people of Thessaloniki that they are the first fruits of God's redeeming work on earth.

They are responding to God's call as proclaimed by Paul and the church,  
and he praises and lauds their efforts.

In verses 5 and 15, Paul is autobiographical.

He is calling to the front of their memory what he shared before, back when he was with them,  
what was the essence of the Christian faith. Listen to the Word.

<sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?

<sup>15</sup> "So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught..., either by word of mouth or by our letter [by the Word]."

"In dubio, pro tradito."  
When in doubt, hold fast to tradition.

Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish the traditions but to fulfill them."

Jesus is the fulfillment of the faith practices that have sustained and carried the chosen people through our toughest times and most challenging experiences.

And thank God we had the rituals, the sacraments, the rites of worship to carry our souls, our church, and our fragmented world into a new day of healing and hope.

When in doubt, hold fast to tradition.  
When problems arise,  
trust the traditions that have carried you through thick and thin.

Remember and hold dear the rituals and sacraments  
that have sustained the whole people of God in the past.  
The Word that was alive and vital then is still alive and just as vital.  
These are comforting words for troubled people.  
They are also invigorating!  
Let's burn some brain cells and look at traditions with a critical eye.

Which traditions that we practice serve to lift up the power of God's love?

What tradition do you think best tells the story of who we are?

Is there a tradition that needs to be reinterpreted for a new day?

Try this one on for size: how important to you is the form and function of a tradition?

If our Elders picked up the communion tray and found absolutely nothing there  
(this really happened one Sunday!)  
would Holy Communion have mattered more or less?  
(that day was certainly memorable!)

Some traditions are like a railroad track,  
designed to keep the faith community on target and moving forward  
without getting derailed or lost.

Some traditions are sacred cows;  
sometimes a sacred cow needs to be slaughtered so the church can grow forward.

A friend once pointed out  
that anytime a church does something twice  
it becomes a tradition.

There is a difference between tired repetition and theological ritual,  
and we as the whole people of God are capable of recognizing which has meaning.

Dare to go there, to the place of discernment and discussion.  
Have we asked ourselves the hard questions,  
    like whom does each tradition benefit, or speak to, or serve?  
How can we keep from turning personal preferences into something  
sanctimonious?  
As an authentic, permission-giving, flexible congregation of bright,  
loving folks,  
    we already have what it takes to address such questions,  
        and to do so with grace and humor and integrity.

With this in mind, there are some traditions that were established  
    because a congregation simply repeated them enough times  
        until no one is around who remembers what it was  
    like before,  
        and no one wants to upset the applecart  
by suggesting there might be another way to give glory to God.

Some traditions no longer work, or speak to the people,  
    or communicate the intended message.

And then there are traditions that warm the heart,  
    that remind you and me who we are and whose we are,  
        and we cherish them  
            and teach them to our children and to our  
    neighbors  
and we say,  
    "This loving activity reminds me of God;  
        that ritual points me toward the Creator;  
            this sacrament touches my soul;  
                that ordinance makes me a better person;  
                    these traditions energize the God  
                    movement we call church."

The last time I shared with you in a sermon a Dear Abby letter,  
after worship a mother shared with me  
that during church her 12-year-old son asked her, "Mom, who is  
Abby?"

**Dear Abby** is the name of the notable advice column founded in 1956

by Pauline Phillips under the pen name **Abigail Van Buren** and carried on today by her daughter, Jeanne Phillips.

According to Pauline Phillips, she came up with the pen name, Abigail Van Buren,

by combining the name of a biblical figure, Abigail in the Book of Samuel,

with the last name of former U.S. President Martin Van Buren.

Her twin sister had her own advice column called Ann Landers.

(Source: Wikipedia)

“Dear Abby:

I am a rabbi who was asked by a funeral director to talk with a family dealing with the wife’s terminal illness. When I met Mindy, I was touched by her bravery and sensitivity in confronting her disease. She shared that she and her family were taking charge of the calendar and moving all the holidays forward so they could squeeze in as many celebrations as possible in the coming weeks.

Regardless of the actual date on the calendar, they were celebrating secular and religious holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. These events included decorating, serving the appropriate food associated with the observance — even wearing costumes for Halloween.

On my last visit, Mindy described something else she had done. She invited relatives who lived far away to be with her and gave them quilts she had created over her lifetime. She remarked that it made sense for her to be able to say her goodbyes rather than miss that opportunity. She described it as a “living wake.” A few weeks later, she was gone.

For Mindy, condensing the holidays gave her the ability to control her medical situation in a gracious and innovative way. Her choice of saying goodbye to loved ones gave her — and them — time to heal any rifts that had occurred. In dealing with her own impending death, she bestowed a special gift to us for these upcoming holidays.

Let loved ones know today how important they are to you. If there is a way of resolving a family disagreement, do it as soon as possible. Life is too short for many of these disagreements. Finally, appreciate and enjoy the time we have with family, relatives and friends. It is truly irreplaceable.

Signed Rabbi Albert Slomovitz

Let us pause here before sharing the response.

Traditions serve to tell our story and remind us who and whose we are.

Mindy recognized that her days grew short her priorities were shifting and heightening.

In the face of death and doubt, she held fast to what -- and who -- mattered most.

Dear Abby responded to Rabbi Slomovitz:

Well said. I confess that your account of Mindy's final weeks and her passing left me feeling very emotional. It is a profound lesson for us all, as is a poem that is a favorite of my dear mother's and mine:

#### The Time Is Now

If you are ever going to love me,  
Love me now, while I can know  
The sweet and tender feelings  
Which from true affection flow.  
Love me now  
While I am living.  
Do not wait until I'm gone  
And then have it chiseled in marble,  
Sweet words on ice-cold stone.  
If you have tender thoughts of me,  
Please tell me now.  
If you wait until I am sleeping,  
Never to awaken,  
There will be death between us  
And I won't hear you then.  
So, if you love me, even a little bit,

Let me know it while I am living  
So I can treasure it.  
— Author Unknown

My friends, on this All Saints Day we celebrate that we have been  
given a living faith,  
a way of living God's love out loud and in the silences.

Treasure each moment; treasure each other; treasure God's love for  
you.

Be steadfast.

Be faithful.

To be steadfast is to endure with fidelity,  
with unwavering faithfulness.

When in doubt,

hold fast to the traditions that you were taught.

When fears and foes assail or temptation rears its ugly head,

practice the Christian faith in such a way

as to hold you near and dear to God and one another.

May each tradition remind us of who we are and whose we are,

and if it doesn't then let it go and create one that does.

Please, be not afraid of reinterpreting  
sacred texts or traditions, rites or rituals, sacraments or sanctuaries.

"God chose you as the first fruits for salvation  
through sanctification by the Spirit  
and through belief in the truth."

Thank God we are the first fruits, sanctified and glorious,  
a living, breathing new testament of hope.

In Christ we are a new beginning,  
and every new beginning is some beginning's end.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!



## Prayer

Lord, we are yours.

Please realign our course once again toward a steadfast life.

You created us and re-create us daily; you have loved us and love us still.

We are grateful that through your grace you give us

“eternal comfort and good hope...

and strengthen [us] in every good work and word.”

Empower us with the faith to endure, to be steadfast,

and to start anew, transformed and born again from above,  
through your love.

We thank you, Lord.

We are incredibly grateful

that your church has lasted for so many generations,

and we pray that this church may sustain us today and for days yet to be,

and that we may help to prepare a living legacy for generations to come.

## Invitation to Holy Communion

We wait with eager hearts and hopes for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

We anticipate the Day of the Lord when we will be together with God and one another forever and ever.

Meanwhile, we will be patient. We trust in God and God’s timing, and so we wait for the advent of Christ.

At this Lord’s Table we both remember the Last Supper and we anticipate the Great Banquet to come in the Kingdom of God.

Regardless of whether this Holy Communion is received as a meal of remembrance or reconciliation or anticipation (or all three!), you are welcome to come and celebrate love.

Jesus, a gift of God, loves you now and forevermore. Receive the gifts of God for the whole people of God.