

“Seven Words We Don’t Use in Church”

7 Week Sermon & Worship Series  
Sundays, July 15 – August 26, 2018  
First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Preaching: Senior Pastor Rev. Dr. James L. Brewer-Calvert

<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Holy Scriptures</b>
July 15	SMILE	I Thessalonians 5: 14-18
July 22	CURSES	Psalms 19; Matthew 15: 1-13
July 29	GOSSIP	Proverbs 12: 18; James 3: 9-12; 1 Corinthians 13
August 5	SCIENCE	Genesis 1
August 12	PRONOUNS	Matthew 7: 7-12
August 19	SHAME	John 4
August 26	SEX	Song of Solomon

**“Smile”  
July 15, 2018**

**I Thessalonians 5: 14-18**

<sup>14</sup> *And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them.*

<sup>15</sup> *See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.*

<sup>16</sup> *Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

Yesterday Keith Williams, Larry Todd and I went to the Atlanta Braves game. The Hometown Nine got beat 3-0 by the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Afterward, while we waited for the MARTA bus to arrive,

I was scribbling a few thoughts down on a notepad.

Larry guessed correctly that I was thinking about today’s sermon, so, he asked what it was to be about.

I showed him some notes I’d made, and pointed out the main scripture:

*Rejoice always,*

*pray without ceasing,*

*give thanks in all circumstances;*

*for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

“Even when the Braves lose,” said Larry.

That’s so true, my friend.

Faith is experiential.

We experience God’s presence, God’s trust in us, and we rejoice in it.

“Rejoice always,”

for God’s love is real and present and alive,

even when the Braves lose

or it rains on your parade

or when life is difficult.

Initially when the inspiration for today’s message came to me,

I was more than a little concerned that the topic was shallow, vapid, empty.

As I studied the Holy Scriptures

and explored the roots and fruits of this passage from First Thessalonians,

it became clear that this is a word “for such a time as this.”

You see, the Apostle Paul planted a new church of Jesus Christ

in the coastal town of Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki is a Greek port city on the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean Sea.

The city of Thessaloniki has stood the test of time and invasions, storms and fire.

Today there’s still evidence of Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman history.

Roman Emperor Galerius’ 4th-century palace include the Rotunda

that has been both a church and a mosque.

Thessaloniki’s pristine beaches and expansive view of the Aegean

were there for the Apostle Paul to walk along and admire

when he started a church.

The scenery and the people took his breath away.

The new Christians were eager to follow God,

Yet, sadly, tragically, they were persecuted for their faithfulness.

Paul had already left town by then,

yet word of it reached him.

He wrote back to offer condolences for their difficulties and trauma,

their pain and anxieties. (2: 16-18)

But he did not permit them to wallow in self-pity nor to give up or give in or give way.

In this excerpt from the Apostle Paul’s letter

to the fledgling church in Thessaloniki,

we see that Paul emphasized

that rejoicing, prayer and giving thanks

are not relegated to Sunday morning.

Paul emphasized “*always*,” “*without ceasing*,” “*in all circumstances*.”

He encouraged them to orient  
their very existence toward God.  
Church participants affirmed that every moment of their lives,  
in every decision they faced, were grounded in the grace of God.  
They did not have a Sunday God and a secular week from Monday to Saturday.  
They welcomed God into their lives...daily.

God was to be a part – not apart but a part—of everyday decision-making.  
*“always,” “without ceasing,” “in all circumstances.”*

How they spent their money,  
what they did for a living,  
how they related with their families and friends  
and strangers in their midst,  
their politics and practices and views on current events,  
all were infused with Who and Whose they were  
as followers of God in Christ Jesus,  
as participants and thereby extensions and ambassadors  
of the Body of Christ.

Where you shop and what you buy and who you vote for and who you welcome  
are inseparable from what you glean  
from the preaching of the Prophets  
and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.

Today the Church of Jesus Christ calls people to a life of worship,  
of awe, of praising a Living God who has faith in us.

*“always,” “without ceasing,” “in all circumstances.”*

*“Life cannot simply be divided into the God-related  
or non-God-related dimensions of human life.”*

(Texts for Preaching, Year B, p. 27)

There isn’t a Sunday morning faith walk,  
which is followed by a separate, different way of living  
Monday through Saturday.

So, my friends, what we talk about and how we behave and to whom we belong  
on Sunday morning in Sunday School and worship and church ministries  
is intimately connected with who we are  
and how we relate to God and one another and ourselves  
throughout the rest of the week.

Faith is lived and living every day of the week.

Faith is lived out loud.

Faith is experiential.

You must experience faith for yourself.

No one else can live your faith for you.

God, who loves you, has faith in you.  
God gifts to you, gives to you, offers to the whole people of God  
a movement to belong to;  
a being to believe in;  
and a way of being to practice.

Faith is experiential.

Faith and trust go hand in hand,  
for God invites us to have the faith, the trust, the confidence  
to step out into the unknown, trusting God will be nigh.

*"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Heb. 11:1*

Faith is an ongoing, ever-growing, exploration  
of our connectedness with the Holy.

There is nothing staid or casual or safe about trusting, following, surrendering.

Faith and risk go hand in hand.

*"I believe; Lord, help my unbelief!"*

God's gift of faith to you may start from the outside and work its way deep within.  
Like an unexpected guest that arrives late to the party and becomes the party itself.

*"The faith of your friends can save you,"* teaches Jesus.

Other people's faith can alter and rearrange your life in marvelous ways.

Someone else's trust in the Holy One may be all you need to reorient and restore you.

*Or...*

God's gift of faith may be planted within the essence of your Self, your Soul,  
a Seed that grows and blossoms and bubbles up from deep within your Core,  
fully intended by God to be released, feasted,  
let loose upon the world.

I strongly suspect that God has different and unique and fabulous ways and means  
of gifting to each-and-every living soul the joy of faith.

Just as no two snowflakes are alike, you are unique in all the world.

God has and is and will give to you

all the faith you will ever need

to make it in this world and to carry you over into the next.

For this and more, let us be grateful. Be grateful. Give thanks.

In your own way, show your gratitude. Wear it. Express it.

Communicate however you may and must your gratitude,

gratitude for the gift of faith in a Living Christ,

the love of God, and the faith community of saints and sinners.

Recently I visited a congregation for Sunday worship.

*"Want a bulletin?"* snapped a Greeter standing near the doorway.

She could not have been any grumpier.

I was almost afraid that if I accepted her bulletin I might catch whatever she had.

*“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile,  
a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment,  
or the smallest act of caring,  
all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”* Leo Buscaglia

Faith is experiential.

Christina Nieves and Daniel Calvert were married in 2016, by Daniel’s Uncle James.

Christina is an epidemiologist and Daniel is a teacher.

They were feeling sluggish, so they started walking together,

then graduated to jogging a block or two in the middle of their walks.

They accepted a challenge to train for and run a 5K (3.1-mile race).

Now they are in training for the New York City Marathon,

a 26.2-mile journey across the city.

Daniel said their turning point really began

when a running coach told them

if they wanted to be better runners, to smile.

*“Smile while you run,” she said. “When you smile, you release joy.  
You feel less pain. You go farther, feel lighter, enjoy the experience more.”*

Then Daniel made a funny, goofy grin.

Yet there is a great truth here, much more than simply saying “grin and bear it.”

Rejoice “always” “constantly” “in all circumstances”

Smiles, like faith, can go from the outside in or emerge from the inside out.

Smiles bubble up and break forth after something humorous

or a heartfelt expression of joy and rejoicing.

Smiles can work in reverse, as well.

Put a smile on your face and it will warm your heart,

connect with your body, impact your attitude

Any way you make one, a smile shared can lead to a life changed.

When you smile, you release joy into a world that needs it so badly.

When we refuse or neglect to let out our joy

because the world has beat us down, then Satan wins.

I refuse to let evil conquer the joy God has placed deep in my heart.

When we claim our birthright and rejoice always, in all circumstances,

each time we smile and laugh in the face of mayhem and the pain,

we let our little light shine, and the world is a brighter place for all.

And all means all may be led to the light of God's love.

Rejoice always...and forever.

Oh, and back to yesterday's excursion.

Larry, Keith and I took MARTA back to Larry's home in Decatur.

This time the bus was a local, not an express.

The bus picked up and dropped passengers in Smyrna, Valdosta, Miami.

It was very late when we arrived at Larry's home,

the driver having trusted his Google Maps to do the navigating,

which took us on zig zags and over every speed bump

in East Lake, Oakhurst, and Decatur.

Keith and I hopped off the bus and thanked the driver.

The driver lowered the ramp for Larry's wheelchair.

But Larry did not drive toward the ramp.

He turned his chair around to face the other passengers.

He smiled. He said good night. He gave them and thumbs up.

Then he eased himself over to the ramp.

Once on the street, he looked the driver in the eye, gave him a fist bump, and smiled.

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

EXTRA MATERIAL:

*"Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face?" asked Henri Nouwen.*

*"Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment?"*

*Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions.*

*I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits,*

*here in this world and the life to come."*

#### The Power of Attitude

*"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do.*

*It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you ... we are in charge of our attitudes."*

--Charles Swindoll