

**Aughnacloy, Ballymagrane, Clogherney & Sixmilecross Presbyterian Churches**

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***John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."***

Dear Friends

As your minister, it is a great privilege that I have in bringing this weekly devotion to you. Our theme for this week is 'Holy Ambition'. I trust that you are all keeping safe and well. Many of us are beginning to get a bit fed-up with the Lockdown, social distancing, self-isolation and shielding. Remember, we all in this together, keep up the distancing and so on for the greater good of our communities, neighbours and friends. May God's word be an encouragement to us all as we reflect on the writing of Paul encouraging us to live a life of purity before God as we return to 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. 11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Today as we come to verses 9-12 of chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians we continue to reflect on who we are in Christ. Last time we thought about relationships. Verses 9-12 focus on the personal relationship, how we may work out our relationship with Christ in the everyday tumble of life. This passage speaks to us about having the right kind of ambition in our relationship with God. It is a Holy ambition! How we develop in our relationship with God.

There are at least two types of ambition, there is one which many are familiar with, in the work place or generally in society, it is the clamour for promotion to the top of the career ladder, or getting to the front of the Queue.

That is ambition as the world sees it. However the Bible teaches that selfish ambition can be unfulfilling. There are many hard charging, dog-eat-dog, businessmen and women who spend all their adult lives scratching and clawing their way to the top of the ladder of success. Then they discover that it's leaning against the wrong wall.

There is a wonderful kind of ambition that we can call holy ambition. A holy ambition is striving to do what GOD wants you to do. When you place your life under the Lordship of Jesus, you find that whatever God wants you to do, you want to do it too! What is your ambition in the Lord's will?

Have a love for others - Paul loved these believers and they loved him. They had a reputation for loving other believers as well. Paul commended them for this, but he warned them not to be satisfied. He encouraged them to let their love grow deeper and wider. In the city of Thessalonica, everyone would have noticed the change of lives in these Christians. The change was noticeable, they did not participate in the religious ceremonies and the immorality of the pagan temples, they did not cheat each other or strangers, and they worked hard and took care of each other. If you want your faith to be evident to those around you, Paul says, live in a sacrificial way, a way that reflects the love of Jesus to other people, is the way to go. The Bible gives us the definition of real love. It's the description of love Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13:4 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.*

As Paul is writing to the church here. I think he is asking us look around in your fellowship/community for people who need your love, which can be expressed in so many ways.

This is partly what has been achieved by the Aughnacloy and Ballymagrane food Bank, getting together to provide in a practical way for our community, and people beyond our fellowship have noticed and appreciate the difference by the motivation we have in doing this

Paul has a big picture in mind, which is that we would grow in our faith, trust and hope in the Lord. This theme has an emphasis on pleasing God in our lives this fits within the broader frame work of his two perspectives on the Christian life. There must be:

Christian Growth! - These Christians were walking in a way that pleased the Lord, and Paul urged them to, 'to do this more and more.' Paul called on them not to be satisfied with their present state as Christians but to keep growing in the likeness of God. The Christian life does not have a point at which we attain total maturity in this life. We do not stop growing as Christians. If we think we are doing what Paul describes in this passage, we must not stop. We must not grow weary in doing well, but rather continue to follow the path that Jesus had laid out for us. Growing for the Lord followed by:

Sacrificial Life! - This would be the Christian virtue of unselfishness. The Christian life is marked to a great degree, by sacrificial living, and we need to be hearing that message over and over again because we are inherently prone to be self-centred. As Christians we are called to please God. What are our ambitions in life?

Are we making good use of the abilities we have? Or is our lives consumed with what we want for ourselves?

As individuals do we lead a God centred life or a self-centred life?

Why is this important? Well, when we follow the one who sacrificed Himself for us, we follow the one who gave up everything that He had in order to bring us in to a right relationship with God.

During this present pandemic, there are many examples of sacrificial living all around us. There are many in the caring professions that are working beyond what would normally be expected. Then there are the Captain Tom's going the extra mile to raise funding for charity, the food banks helping individuals and families facing challenging times and there will be many more opportunities I believe in the days ahead when as Christ's followers we can demonstrate Christ's care and compassion in our communities. There are many channels of opportunity in these present times which allow us to fulfil our Christian calling as Paul concludes in v12 *so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders...*

Paul sets a challenge before us in verses 1-12 of chapter 4 before he moves us forward to consider the second coming of Jesus in his next section. Here he draws our attention to relationships, both in those around us, as last week and more importantly, today, our individual relationship with Jesus, which is the key to eternal glory with Him. You may have the ambition of being in Heaven with our Lord, but what have you done in order to fulfil your ambition?

Trust the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary to take away your sin, that barrier that prevent your entry into Heaven, leave it with Him and move forward with your life and live for Him and His coming Glory.

Love others!      Grow with Christ! Life for Christ!

**Prayer:** Lord God we thank you for the challenges of your inspired word. Life is often an uphill journey. However you have provided the means to overcome even the greatest of hurdles, the work of your Holy Spirit within us. Lord we ask that each of us would embrace the courage you have so willingly gave us on Calvary, equipping us for the future glory of life with you forever more.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest remain and abide with us all, this day and forever more. Amen.

Love divine, all loves excelling,	Come almighty to deliver,	Finish then your new creation,
Joy of heaven to earth come down: Fix in us your humble dwelling,	Let us all your grace receive; Suddenly return and never,	Pure and sinless let us be; Let us see your great salvation
All your faithful mercies crown. Jesus you are all compassion,	Nevermore Your temples leave; You we would be always blessing,	Perfect In eternity: Changed from glory into glory
Boundless love that makes us whole;	Serve You as Your hosts above,	Till in heaven we take our place,
Visit us with Your salvation,	Pray and praise you without seasoning,	Till we lay our crowns before You,
Enter every trembling soul.	Glory in Your perfect love.	Lost in wonder, love and praise Charles Wesley 1707-1788