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“Focus, Frustration & Forgiveness” The Rev. Kara Leslie(11/19/2023, Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts  
be acceptable unto you, O Lord,  
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we pray.  
Amen.

Our gospel reading was so cheerful  
that I've chosen to talk about First Thessalonians.  
But truthfully, I love First Thessalonians.  
It's one of the very first letters that Paul ever writes,  
about 50 common eras, so about 20 or 30 years  
after the death of Jesus.  
So it is an early letter to a very new community of believers.  
And it's in Thessalonica.  
So here is a picture of Thessalonica.  
And this here is the white tower.  
And that's from about 1200.  
And it looks really big, but it is only six stories tall.  
But you can see how far you would be able to see ships  
coming in in this early seaport community.  
You could see for many, many miles  
who was coming in the variety of people.  
Now, this early church believers, they're in need of encouragement.  
Last week, we heard from the very end of chapter four.  
And it said, encourage each other, build each other up.  
And here we are in the middle of chapter five.  
And again, we hear these words, build each other up.  
Encourage one another.  
Now, it seems a simple thing.  
But if it really was that simple,  
wouldn't we be doing it all the time?  
We want to be encouraged to live boldly in our faith.  
And enter our calling as the body of Christ.  
We are pulled into many directions in our lives.  
But we are never fully satisfied, never full, never complete  
until we find our love, until we find ourselves

in the love of Jesus.  
Our destiny is not the struggle of this world.  
It is not the hardships, rather our life and our death  
and our breath are destined for Christ.  
It is Christ who is our destiny, as we serve God  
in unity, constancy, and peace.  
This morning, I want to focus on the word focus, frustration,  
and forgiveness.  
Now, for some of us, that might sound  
a little bit like Thanksgiving.  
Focus on the time.  
What times are going to get all done?  
Is it going to make it?  
Am I going to get to the store before it closes?  
Or frustration?  
How is this all going to happen?  
I don't know if I have the capability  
to deal with all the frustration around Thanksgiving.  
And then, of course, forgiveness, the person  
that you don't like in your family sitting next to you  
at the table, forgiveness.  
So first of all, I want to talk about time.  
So focusing on time.  
Maybe some of you remembered this.  
Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.  
But they are all representative of different generations.  
The passage from days of our lives,  
just in case you didn't know, that was socrates that said that.  
I did not know that.  
But I found it because I have to admit,  
I've watched days of our lives over and over,  
because it's the same thing over and over.  
And I've also watched many videos for Taylor Swift  
on her concert.  
And I've seen that clock countdown so many times.  
And I'm not there, but I am there.  
So time is important.  
And we can become focused on time that's not healthy for us  
in ways that is very paralyzing.  
This early community wants to know, hey, when is Jesus coming back?  
When are we going to heaven?  
Let's get this going, because this in between time is hard.  
And what Paul reminds him is that you live right now in grace.  
We do not know when a child will be born.  
We do not know when someone will die.  
We do not know when someone will come and rob.  
But what we do know is that God is with us,  
and that his grace sustains us.  
Focus on time, your time with God.  
Focus on how God's grace holds you

regardless of what's truly happening in your day of your life.  
Now I want to talk about frustration.  
Somebody asked me earlier, OK, when is the first Sunday of Advent?  
Just in case you don't know, five weeks from today is Christmas Eve.  
Five weeks.  
So how's your frustration now?  
Hmm.  
I don't know if you've been in traffic recently,  
but traffic is kind of crazy out there.  
That it is slower and it's thicker.  
And I don't like either one of those.  
And then you go to the grocery store, and this is the time you go.  
Nobody else should be there, right?  
Just a few people, but not everybody.  
And then, of course, there is the traffic, there's that.  
And then we're so thankful that we can just  
hit send, purchase, check out on the internet, and boom,  
it's there in the next day.  
So we have this inability to have patients with life.  
And being instant is often very addictive.  
None of us have ever looked like this, never.  
Or like this.  
But another real frustration in our world right now  
is the amount of evil.  
We see it in our larger world.  
We see wars and cruelty beyond our control  
and beyond our understanding.  
And yet we're frustrated, even more so  
with the lack of kindness and justice.  
Many people have recently come to me and said,  
I am ready for God to show up and do God's thing.  
My prayers are not being answered.  
I don't think God's really listening, and I'm done.  
Something has got to change in my life.  
Now call that faith frustration, and it's real,  
and it happens to all of us more than once in our lifetime.  
So what do we do when there's faith frustration?  
First of all, it's real, it happens.  
I would suggest that you not say to someone, well,  
it's just God's timing.  
Or there's a purpose, this is part of God's plan.  
To me, that's like a bunch of burnt turkey.  
I wouldn't do it.  
I would suggest that you lean in and that you listen.  
Maybe somebody needs prayer, and you just reach out  
and you hold their hand, and you say, dear God,  
I am praying for this person right here, right now.  
Come into their storm.  
I have a friend who is struggling, and I texted her the other day.  
I said, I can't.

There's not much I can do about all the hardships that are in your life.  
But I can be a prayer partner, an spiritual companion, and I believe in you, and I know God is with you.  
So what do we do when things are frustrating in our lives? We spiritually lean in to build each other up and into encourage each other.  
And finally, I want to talk about forgiveness. Now, forgiveness is not easy, but it is part of our journey. Sometimes we forget, do we not? Even at this age, the goodness of forgiveness, forgiveness. Most importantly, forgiveness is what we are destined made for, created to be in that relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's forgiveness that we can forget so easily. We think the things in our world have more power and more say, and we fail to remember God's forgiveness washes away all the sins, all the worries.  
So if you're walking around feeling like, well, you know, I'm not really all together. My sin list is higher than my Christmas list. And you know, life just isn't going well. God's forgiveness is part of our lives. It's part of our destiny. We are not destined for wrath. We are destined for forgiveness and love in Jesus Christ. Now, you might think you have a different destiny. But God's destiny for you is to be united in love and compassion and forgiveness and hope, all the things that give life, not only in this day, but in our life to come. If we could live as forgiving children of God, then I believe our frustration would be lower. If we could trust the forgiveness given us by God, that freedom of grace, then I believe we would be less anxious. Forgiving and receiving forgiveness helps us in our lives to lean in and to build each other up. So if you're going to focus on time, focus on God's time. If you're going to be frustrated, which we all are, turn it over to God.  
And if forgiveness is a struggle for you, then I pray that the bread of life and the cup of salvation will remind you that you are worthy. You are forgiven and you are loved. Kind of like this picture, the love mends the brokenness of our hearts.  
Now, I fought to myself as I end this sermon. I was like, how can I encourage? Could I put a graphic up that would show like all of us leaning in, maybe? But I'd really prefer for us to feel something. And so we're going to sing a song.

And I want to encourage us, if you want to stand, you can, if you want to sit.

But we're going to sing through this song.

And my prayer is that it will encourage you.

That when you leave here, you will sing these words.

When you're focused on time, you'll sing them.

When you're frustrated, you will sing them.

When you're looking at everything wrong, and God seeing everything right, you will sing them.

Oh, how I love Jesus.

Oh, how I love Jesus.

Oh, how I love Jesus because He first loved me.

Oh, how I love Jesus.

Oh, how I love Jesus.

Oh, how I love Jesus because He first loved me.

Be encouraged, my friends.

Amen.