

October 4, 2020 Sermon – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19

I wrote a short dialogue for part of today's message. I hope you can relate to it and it will give you something to think about as we begin the week before Thanksgiving.

Dave: Hey, Sue, what are you doing?

Sue: Nothing.

Dave: Oh. Want to do something?

Sue: Not really. I'm kind of tired today.

Dave: I know. So am I, but if we do something we might feel better.

Sue: Like what?

Dave: I don't know. What do you feel like doing?

Sue: Nothing.

Dave: Oh yeah, right. Why don't you feel like doing something?

Sue: We are in the middle of a pandemic, you know!

Dave: Yeah, I know. But that hasn't stopped us from doing things, until now.

Sue: Why don't you go for a walk and maybe I'll feel like doing something later.

Dave: Okay, I can do that. But it's better when we walk together. I can wait.

Sue: I'm just so tired of all the things we can't do anymore because of this virus.

Dave: I get it. So am I. But there are still a lot of things we can do.

Sue: I know, I know. But I miss those other things! Especially getting together with our friends and for in person church worship services. We didn't hug our grandchildren for months until lately and now the restrictions that are being put in place might keep us from doing so again. And the vacations we had planned for have been cancelled and we can't go anywhere inside without wearing facemasks. Even when we're outside we have to keep our distance from other people and wash our hands constantly. I guess I have COVID Fatigue or as Jamie called it ... COVID Frustration!

Dave: *(pause for a moment of silence)* Are you going to be mad at me if I tell you I'm thankful I have you to go through this pandemic with?

Sue: No, and I'm thankful I have you with me, too. But I'm still tired of it all.

Dave: Okay, I'll go for that walk and see you in an hour or so.

I wonder how many people have been having conversations like the one Sue and I just had in the past several months? While we may not have said the exact words you just heard, we've certainly said something like them and probably thought of statements like them many more times. Also, we can flip back and forth between who is tired and who is feeling like doing something.

It's difficult to always be on top of your game and full of energy with a sunny outlook on life. In fact, constantly positive people can be rather annoying at times and when people tell us to just snap out of it when we're tired and feeling down, it can really rub us the wrong way. Which is why it may be better to just go for a walk at times or leave someone alone to work through their feelings when they're not in a good mood. This isn't always the best thing to do but sometimes it is. The challenge is to know when to walk away and when to stay.

So, let's imagine that I've gone for a walk and am back home.

Dave: Hey, Sue, I'm back.

Sue: Did you have a good walk?

Dave: Yeah, I did. Are you feeling any better?

Sue: Not much, but if you want to do something we can.

Dave: Great, how about we go for a curbside visit with some of our church members? Or we can just go for a car ride into the country. The leaves are just beginning to turn colour on some of the trees.

Sue: Sure, maybe we can do both at the same time. I guess we can be thankful that we have so many lovely people to visit with, even if it is from a distance. And we can be thankful we have a car to use and that we're both in fairly good health.

Dave: You're right. And thankful that our family is safe and they all have a place to live with food to eat. And look at the view out of our condo window. The tops of those maple trees are a mixture of red, orange, yellow and green. It's gorgeous!

Sue: I know, but I miss our home. If we hadn't sold it and moved to this eighth floor condo, I could just step outside onto the grass or work in the flower beds. I could watch the neighbourhood children playing and biking. Do you remember how some of them would come over to our place and chalk with me on our driveway? I loved doing that and we would draw rainbows and they would put their hands on the pavement and I would trace their handprints in bright colours. Sometimes, I wish we had stayed in our home.

Dave: So do I at times. But we've moved before and everytime we've done so we've always made new friends. Why, in only a short time, we've met Wayne and Fran, Mary and Bob, Brian and Jean, Konnie and Doris, Anu, Susan, Daphne, David, Alex, Wayne and Mary Jane, and many more people we wouldn't know if we hadn't moved. If we had stayed in our home we would have been isolated a lot more than we are now. Often, when we go down the elevator or step out the front doors for a walk, we'll meet someone and have a short chat with them. Sometimes it turns into a longer conversation and we get to know more about them.

Sue: True, but there's people we used to see that we don't anymore because of this pandemic. Even though we talk with them on the phone, it's just not the same. You know I like to hug people and I can't do that anymore without putting them in danger from this invisible virus I may or may not have. And while working from home is okay so that we can prepare online worship services, I'd much rather be in church where I can see people and shake their hands or give them a hug. There are so many people I used to see most Sunday's that I haven't seen for over 6 months now.

Dave: I know, but we've been part of a dozen churches in the past 25 years and in every church we've met so many kind, thoughtful, and generous people. People we would never have known if we had stayed in only one church. I'm so thankful for those experiences and the opportunities we've had. And I think we'll find ways to be together with friends, church members, and family as we learn more about this virus. Even with the second wave upon us, we aren't shutting down as completely as we did in the first wave. People don't seem to be as fearful either. We still need to respect the virus for the harm it can do to us, but we don't need to fear it. There's an important difference between the two. To respect it means we take the necessary precautions to keep ourselves

and others safe with physical distancing, handwashing, and facemasks. To fear it means we shut ourselves up in our homes and don't go near anyone else if we do venture out. To respect something makes sense and is a healthy way to deal with dangerous situations. To fear that same thing is not helpful or a healthy response.

Sue: Alright, enough already. I hear you. Let's just get out of here and go visit someone.

Dave: Great. I'll grab us a couple of apples and granola bars.

Once again, Sue and I haven't had this exact conversation and there are times she is the one who is encouraging me to go for a visit and I'm feeling a bit tired. But the point I'm trying to make is that while we all need down time and a break from work and our regular routine, there are also times when we need to just get up and do something. I'm also attempting to emphasize that change does not have to be a bad or scary thing but can be a good and wonderful thing for us. There are people who will come through this pandemic having a better understanding of themselves, a deeper appreciation of others, and a more thankful attitude for life and the things of this world. I hope you are one of those people.

I have shared this short dialogue with you between Sue and myself with hesitation because I don't want to make this message about us. I know that we have it much better than many people at this time. There are families who have had loved ones die in the past six months. There are people who have had spouses, family members, and close friends die shortly before the pandemic began. Those families and people are missing something much more important and valuable than what Sue and I are missing. They are missing their loved one's presence and the comfort and encouragement those loved ones brought to that relationship.

There are also people who have lost their jobs or who are not able to work at this time and the financial insecurity that can create can be debilitating. There are people whose immune system is compromised or who are of an age where catching this virus can be deadly which can lead to panic attacks or a high level of anxiety. There are people of all ages who have been waiting for surgery who are concerned that if they have to continue to wait they may reach a point where

surgery will be too late help them. There are many people who are facing many more risks and experiencing much greater losses than Sue and I are, and I imagine that many of you are in a similar situation to ours. We should keep things in perspective and not let our concerns about our own welfare overwhelm us and lead us down the path of discouragement, hopelessness or despair. We will do better if we give thanks for the positives in our lives instead of thinking about any negatives.

There are several scripture passages that remind and encourage us to be thankful, and as we begin this week before Thanksgiving, I hope we can all be a bit more thankful than usual. Psalm 117 says: "Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him all you peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord!" In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus." (1 Corinthians 1:4) And in Ephesians, Paul writes: "Give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:20)

So, let me finish off the imaginary dialogue between Sue and myself after we've returned home from an afternoon drive and some visits.

Dave: So, Sue, how are you feeling?

Sue: Good. I enjoyed getting out and doing something, even though I felt like doing nothing this morning.

Dave: I know. It's a bit of a mystery how being thankful, forgetting about oneself and focusing on others can lift one's spirits and mental well-being.

Sue: Actually, you seem a bit tired now. Do you want to do something?

Dave: If you don't mind, I think I'll just hang out here and do nothing for now. Why don't you go for a walk and we'll see how I feel when you get back.

Sue: Okay, I can do that. But, it's better when we walk together. ;)

