

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
November 13, 2016

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Theme: “Taking Care of Business”

And if your train's on time
You can get to work by nine
And start your slaving job to get your pay
If you ever get annoyed
Look at me I'm self-employed I love to work at nothing all day
And I'll be

Taking care of business (every day) Taking care of business (every way)
I've been taking care of business (it's all mine)
Taking care of business and working overtime
(Bachman Turner Overdrive—“Taking Care of Business”)

Thus far Bachman Turner Overdrive. Yes, taking care of business. There are two questions to those in business (not original with me): 1) What's your business? 2) How's business? Now it used to be said you could tell what a person's business was by looking at his calendar and his checkbook. Now all you have to do is check the smartphone.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians has a lot to do with business. It concerns the business he had been about and the business they were now about or not. Some were busying themselves with other's people's business. Other were busying themselves with idleness. Paul writes, “Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.” (vs 12)

It's really about God's business, always. We are God's business. He created us and preserves us. From something really common, dirt, he made something very special—a man and a woman in His image. He made the man directly from the dirt and then the

woman from the rib of the man of dirt. It was the perfect life for the man and the woman with God, with all creation, and with one another. But they took the bite of the devil's bait and went back to the dirt. They were from the dust and to dust they would return.

Now all creation has been quite the dusty place ever since. But the Creator still provides for His creation. God opens His hand and satisfies the needs of every living creature. He provides all we need for this body and life and He provides more, much more. He provides us with renewed life with Him, the life only the Spirit brings. He didn't leave us to the dirt and the dust.

He has redeemed, rescued us. He has done so in the flesh, in person, more specifically in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Him all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form. The day of our salvation comes on just the right day of the flow of all God's days. The prophet Malachi speaks of the coming of Elijah before the great and awesome day of the Lord. Elijah has come in John the Baptist. John did turn the hearts of the children to the fathers and that hearts of the fathers to the children (Malachi 4:5,6) , all turned in the way of repentance. The Lord Himself has come. It was from heaven above to earth below. He came in that manger in Bethlehem. For Him it would be to Egypt, back to Judea, and then to Nazareth of Galilee. He was always about God's business. From the time of His baptism by John, He was about the Messiah business of seeking and saving the lost. He headed for Jerusalem and all that awaited Him there such as teaching with authority against the authorities, rejection, betrayal, suffering, the cross, and the tomb. He was doing the dirty business of redemption, taking all the dirt of our sin upon Himself that we might have the cleansing of forgiveness.

Our Lord is still about His business. He does it through His people, His body, the church. It did it through those who have come before us. He did it through Paul.

“Brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as has happened among you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:1) That word is the whole counsel of God, the message of Christ crucified, buried, raised, ascended, reigning and returning. Paul had preached the word to those to Thessalonians and to many more. He directs them to the traditions, that is the teachings passed on to them (as we have them in the Scriptures).

Through the working of the Spirit in that Word they had been brought to faith, out of the dirt, to new life, new creations in Christ. Paul writes to them, “We have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things we command.” (vs 4) The Lord was directing hearts to the love of God and perseverance of [faith in] Christ. (vs 5)

God has been about His business of calling to the new life in Christ. There are more to be called. God desires all to believe and come to the knowledge of the truth. Paul writes in Romans 10, “And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (vv 14-15) The calling to preaching still goes out. We are not all called to be preachers, but all called to be about our Lord’s work.

The day is still coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be toast, actually stubble (Malachi 4:1). Jesus speaks of that coming day in our Gospel lesson today from Luke 21. He speaks of two things really—the fall of Jerusalem, which has happened, and His return, which is yet to be. He is not returned. His business in this present world is not done, still more to take care of. We are part of carrying out that business as we live as the new creations He has made us, that is, salt and light. Through us others are served and through us the One who cleanses, forgives, renews, and strengthens is revealed. We are about our Lord’s business that more might believe.

But we can be distracted to other business, business that is not really the right business. “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition handed that you received from us. (vs 6) Some have stopped digging and are leaning on their shovels—why? In Thessalonica some may have assumed that the Lord was returning soon, very soon. They would wait for it, pray for it, speculate about it, and talk a lot about. It was a though all the Lord’s business was over and they had their bags all backed ready for the angelic taxi to take them home. And in the meantime, they were depending upon others to provide their means of support.

Paul points out that he and his fellow workers had set an example. He reminds them that they did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it. “But with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.” (vs 8) It was not because they did not have the right to support, no, they were setting an example (vs 9). Paul reminds them of the command they has previously given, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” (vs 10)

How is it with us? Our Lord has not yet returned. Are we just hanging around the sandbox anticipating his return idly? We may talk about His return. Study the teachings, and then live as though it’s never going to happen. The shovel of meeting needs and/or speaking the Gospel becomes like a ceremonial shovel used to break ground, and then is put up on the shelf until the next ceremony. A little work is done, scratching of the surface, then a lot of rest and idleness.

But it could go beyond idleness, could digress into getting into other people’s business. “For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.” (vs 11) We take notice as to how others are doing their work, or not doing it.

We suspect others may be working more fruitful ground and we are a little resentful or jealous. Maybe we tell them how they are to be doing the work that we are not doing. We disrupt the digging of others by pointing out their faulty digging, and maybe it's not even to them but to others around them, a talking that disrupts, diminishes trust. It happens that one just lays down the shovel and walks off because he thinks his digging is not appreciated. The dirt begins to fly, but not the dirt removed to reveal a new creation. It may well happen that one takes care of business by working at nothing all day and in the process disrupt the work of others by throwing dirt on those who are trying to work.

So what's the answer? God will finish His business. The Lord does return. As we saw last week, the building of His church goes on. The signs Jesus speaks of continue: nation against nation, earthquakes, famines, pestilence, persecutions. The Word continues to go out. We, God's people, take it out. The Spirit does His work through that Word. There are more to be brought in. Our Lord knows when that full number is complete. When the time is full it will be time for the end of time as we now it. Jesus returns.

Paul tells us not to quit our Lord's business, no, don't start talking about the work instead of doing the work and even start keeping others from their work. "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life." (Luke 21:34) Paul says, "As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good." (vs 13) Now is not the time to encourage idleness or the business of busybodiness. Again, we read, "Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus to do their work quietly and to earn their own living." (vs 12) God will do His good in His time through our good. Needs will be met, more brought to faith as new creations. No, don't quit doing our Lord's good.

It could be time to quit, time to quit idleness and being into others business. It is time to stop throwing dirt and to get back to mining for treasure. We have encouragement to do so. Not all have faith, but the Lord is always faithful (vv 2, 3). There is plenty of work to do, good work, rewarding. We do it so the word of the Lord may continue to speed ahead and be honored (vs 1). Our faith shows, is at work, so more may know. For Jesus' sake. Amen