SERMON RECAP
NOVEMBER 1 2026

Series: BECOMING
Sermon: Becoming a community of encouragement and endurance
Scripture: 1 Thess 2:13-20

When reading today's passage from Paul's letter, **we must first and foremost address his short diatribe against Jewish people.** Verses 15-16 has served as fodder for anti-Jewish violence for centuries. I am fully convinced that if Paul had known he was writing Scripture, he would have chosen his words more carefully, and if he knows of the evil that has been done in the name of his words, he would weep.

It is always important to remember that when we read the New Testament, we are reading the thoughts of one side in a bitter dispute. It is as if we are listening to a fight between a newly divorced couple, but we only hear one side of the talk.

Paul was writing to a small community of Christ followers who were struggling. The synagogue was the heart of their community. It was their social capital, their safety net, and their identity. And because they were making the bold claim that Jesus was the Messiah, they were now removed from that community. Paul was treated by religious leaders as if he was attacking their faith, their Scriptures, and their community, and their way of life. It became a bitter divorce.

The Christians in Thessalonica were building something new even as they were rooted in something ancient. Paul did not believe he was creating a new religion. He believed that he was opening up a relationship to God to all people, and for this he had been rejected by his own people. So he was angry. We get words of a man who was in anguish - over being rejected by his people, and also for being separated from the small community that he helped form.

We saw last week how he was defending himself from attacks. They called him a fake apostle, a bearer of false news, and in it simply for gain or notoriety. We addressed those claims last week, but now we are seeing him thank God for the people who believed him despite these claims.

Yes, there is deep pain and anguish in this letter, but there are also bold words of encouragement. He was feeling abandoned by his people, but he was encouraged by the and grace of this new peopel - the Thessalonican Christians.



The anguish Paul names comes from being abandoned by one group and being separated from another. It is an anguish, I believe, that we can understand**.** I have said before that in many ways we are a church of refugees. While many are long-time members and a part of the deep roots of our tradition, we have many who come from geographic separation and theological abandonment.

Many Christians today feel abandoned when we embrace the "wrong" people. When we welcome immigrants, the poor, and those who are despised, we are told we are not real Christians. Those of us trying to build a community that treasures diversity are accused of attacking people's faith, their Scriptures, their community, and their way of life. But like the Thessalonians, we accept that the good news we have heard is truly from God. It is a divine message of love that empowers us all.

Paul also felt deep sadness at being separated from the community he loved. Separation from home and family is hard, and many in our congregation know that pain well. Paul found comfort in prayer, and he drew strength from the communities he was building in other places. Here at Two Rivers, we are building that kind of community together, one where we pray for one another, lean on one another, and find strength in one another.

Paul's anguish and anger was real, but so was his faith. Even though he was abandoned, he was encouraged by the love of Christ. Despite being separated, he gained endurance from the community. Paul looked at the Thessalonians and said, "You are our glory and joy!" May we be that for each other.

NEXT WEEK: **Next week: Becoming a community of holiness and love 1 Thess 4:1-12**