

## ***Anything Can Happen©***

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### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Acts 17:1-15**

Friday afternoon I arrived home to find my daughter, Annie, and all four of the grandchildren on the floor, playing the game of Life. At the moment, they were all fairly quiet, having a good time, getting along great.

But I noticed as time went by the noise would rise up and there almost be a riot. "Andrew made this play and made me lose one of my lives," someone said. It became quite serious at times. I also observed that when one of the boys became very upset with how plays were being made and lives were lost, Natalie (the peace maker) would say, "You can have one of my lives."

Of course, I was thinking in the back of my mind about this story in Acts and how in real life it kind of goes that way, doesn't it? Things go along nice and smooth and people are happy (at least enough of the people are happy that it seems like every body is).

But then, someone rocks the boat! They make a play that throws everything off center and it stirs things up and people get mad and maybe lives aren't actually lost, but life as it was – calm and peaceful – is lost. With life, anything can happen.

In my social work classes we learned about systems theories and how even in a dysfunctional family, as long as everyone is going with the flow – behaving in the old patterns, no matter how unhealthy those patterns are – the climate is just fine. All seems peaceful.

But, of course, when that one person who is not really fine or feeling peaceful because that person has been the brunt of whatever unhealthy behavior is present – when that person steps off the proverbial merry go round that keeps everything going round and round, on an even keel – it throws things off kilter. It upsets the apple cart.

Everyone is upset, angry, maybe afraid or jealous. Now life is changing. Truth has a way of changing life. Those family members who feel threatened will do everything they can to get that one who is causing the upset to get back on the merry go round with them.

With life anything can happen. And it often does.

I think the church experiences this same kind of upset. Look at how Martin Luther, the first real Reformer, stirred up trouble with his wish to discuss a few of the Roman Catholic Church's practices with the leaders of the Church. He nailed his list of 99 things he disagreed with to the chapel door and it almost got him killed. It certainly caused a riot. Or, at least it caused what is known as The Great Reformation.

The Church was never the same after that. Protestant churches began to grow (but not without much resistance and persecution.) We would not be here today as a Presbyterian Church had not Luther and later, John Calvin and others, persevered in rocking the boat and stirring things up because they believed so strongly in what they were speaking out against.

We've seen the church in our own day struggle to understand new ways of looking at things. We've seen near riots and opposition to issues like having no slaves, or women being ordained.

Of course, we continue to struggle with issues that we have thought for sure we knew the answers to, but we often find that eventually our minds begin to be changed and we come to have a new viewpoint, a new vision.

It was kind of this way for those Jews in Thessalonica that our missionaries went to see.

Paul, Silas and Timothy have traveled 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia and was a bustling seaport city and an important communication and trade center, located at the junction of the great Egnatian Way and the road leading north to the Danube.

The Egnatian Way was a route that made it easier for Rome to move troops throughout the empire. It saw lots of travelers as people made their way for trading goods. It was this route that Paul traveled from Philippi to Thessalonica.

We heard the opening of Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica that Sara read. This was probably written later, when he was in Corinth, but he gives thanks for them and their faith. They have had to persevere against those who would be happy to have the church removed from the city.

Paul, Silas and Timothy find themselves to be the ones who stir things up in Thessalonica. They go into the synagogues and we notice how Paul spends time teaching and reminding these devout, learned Jews about the promise and prophecy in the Old Testament.

He argues his point, using the Scriptures to show how Jesus was the promised Messiah – that everything the prophets said points to Jesus himself. He talks to them about how Jesus had to die and rise again – for the salvation of all people, and how that was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Paul knows that relying on the Scriptures is so important because it all comes together so well. He knows that it was God's use of Scripture that melted his own hard heart. He

believes that it can melt the hearts of others too, and he boldly teaches and preaches. He knows that if he can be changed, so can others. Anything can happen.

And some do come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and rejoice that he is their Lord. And some do not.

It is the rocking of the boat, stirring up a belief system that is as ancient as the rocks that throws everything out of kilter. While some believe, others get jealous and start a riot. They will do about anything to keep things in line with what they've always known. And in this case, some did lose their real lives. This game of life was not a game at all.

They caused so much trouble and created such a dangerous situation for Paul that he had to flee out of the city at night. He traveled about 50 miles on to a town called Berea where, we are told, the people were noble and good. They were open to reading the Scriptures, open to hearing and to believing. They examined the Scriptures themselves and agreed with what Paul was preaching.

But, you know what happened. Those jealous people 50 miles away in Thessalonica were so spiteful they traveled all that way to stir up a riot in Berea as well, to turn the Jews against Paul. And again, Paul had to run for his life.

So what can we glean from this story?

**1. When change happens, anything can happen.** Some will love it and believe in the cause, and will be dedicated to the new belief.

But others are going to want to do their best to stop it. They refuse to hear or see the Scripture in a new way, perhaps for the very fact they might actually change the way they see something if they really look at it. They are so used to holding on to one way, they are terrified of anything different.

**2. I think we can learn from Paul's example here – the Scriptures are so important to us.** If we go back and really spend time in God's Word we can find the truth and the answers we are looking for. That's why it's so important for us to study, to read, to pray over the Scriptures every day. The Holy Spirit will lead us into the truths he would have us believe, and we will be empowered to help others to see that truth if we will allow ourselves that time.

**3. We also can see from history and from the stories in the Bible – like this one – that interpreting the Scriptures is an issue.** Obviously, there were some Jews who simply did not come to the same conclusion as Paul about Jesus being God's Son.

They were well educated in the Scriptures, yet they were set in their ways, not able to be open to other possibilities than what they knew. One of the major problems the Church has today is that we don't all agree on how we interpret what the Bible says.

We can see from all this that sometimes it is necessary to rock the boat. Many good changes have come about in families, in the work place, in the Church because someone saw a new vision and had the courage to speak out, to get off the merry go round, so to speak.

We don't do it just to be a troublemaker, but only if we truly can see the benefit and the truth in what we doing. And really, we can't see that truth without our own studying and our staying close to the Holy Spirit, letting Him guide us, allowing him to open our eyes to new truths, to melt our hearts and the hearts of others.

May we, as the Church, and as individual believers, be constantly walking in perfect step with the Holy Spirit as we walk through this game of Life, remembering and trusting that "with the Holy Spirit, anything can happen and it probably will!

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