

Scripture Lesson: I Thessalonians 5:11-22

Pew Bible N.T. pg. 193

¹¹Encourage one another and build each other up, as indeed you are doing. ¹²We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers and sisters, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

I Thessalonians 5:11-22

06/01/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

“Lift” – John Nestell, guest preacher

Before I begin today's message, allow me to introduce myself and give you a little bit of my history and my journey of faith and how God's Prevenient Grace worked in my life before I was even aware of it.

I was raised Catholic. My wife Jayne was raised in the Ames UM church here in Saginaw where we also got married. Jayne is a retired nurse and I am a retired airline pilot.

In 1988 we began attending the Clio Bethany Church where Pastor Tom Badley just transferred from a place called “the end of the earth”, You know... The Hancock first UM Church. It's 1 mile north of Houghton. We became very active. I did my first sermon there.

In 1998 we moved to Freeland where we built what we thought was our retirement home. We became members here at Saginaw First. Pastor Hal and Kathy Snedeker were serving here. About a year later we transferred to the Freeland church where Jim Rule was the pastor. He was born and raised in the Keweenaw Peninsula just north of Hancock

In 2006 we sold our retirement home and moved to the Hancock area (you know the end of the earth) to be close to our 3 grandkids and Daughter Jena who had attended MTU in 1995 and never left.

We became members at the Hancock First UM Church at the same time a Pastor you may know was transferred to. Her name was Amy Terhune. Pastor Amy stayed until she was transferred in 2016 to some place in Saginaw. Pastor Scott Lindenberg took over . He was transferred from Ames 1st UM church.

In 2023 my daughter was planning to move to Traverse City since her nest would soon be empty. So we listed our house and some property. It sold within days. We thought we would enjoy the summer on Lake Superior....but we were so wrong! We had 30 days to move out. God had evicted us from the U.P. So we bought property near Gladwin on a lake that currently doesn't exist andmoved to Saginaw.

It's taken a bit to get settled but we became members here 4 weeks ago on star wars day, May the 4th be with you. So Pastor Amy put me right to work here today... Today's message is about lifting people up, so who better to talk to you about lift than a pilot. I've flown over 25,000 hours in a career that lasted 44 years. With God's help I've lifted approximately 1 million people up and set them back down safely. So let me begin.

Lift

I woke up on the morning after the November 5th, 2024 presidential election and I found myself hating 77 million people. I began a long conversation with God. The following dialog consists of the thoughts and prayers I had with God.

God, how could they vote for someone with so many blatant moral questions about their character and behavior. Someone who encouraged an insurrection. It feels disingenuous to the faith we profess and the rule of law we value. I feel betrayed and let down. Disillusioned about the process of this election with hate and fear overtaking the process. The most important value my mom instilled in me growing up was honesty and integrity. I feel that's lacking on many fronts.

Am I right, Lord?..... OAR..... am I wrong?

what is the answer God....., I just feel like I'm up the creek without a Paddle!

Please help me to understand, Lord.

Through my meditation and prayer, God threw me a lifeline to stop me from floating downstream. He was telling me, " Now you know how I feel. I've been giving people the ability to choose since Adam and Eve. They don't always choose wisely. Just like some of the choices you've made. But all people are my children. I will always love you. Remember what my son Jesus said, when he was dying on the cross. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". I will be the one who judges and forgives".....Do you understand me Johnny Boy?

After the intense conversation I had with God which lasted for weeks. I knew I could not continue on the path of hatred.

Today's scripture states that we should not pay evil with evil. No retribution. So I knew I could not join the darkness of hate. I had to forgive 77 million people. People's minds including my own can be changed through communication, prayer, and empathy. Which requires all of us to listen to one another.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. We ought to continue to hold people accountable. But more importantly we must stand up and speak out for the people who are being hurt, marginalized, deprived of equal rights, or oppressed. We must Lift up our neighbors. Just as Jesus commanded us to. To Love God, To love our neighbor.

That's exactly what this church has been doing with Pflag housed here. You are lifting people Up. You love your neighbor by providing Community free meals each month along with the backpack program for 72 kids. These are some of the reasons why Jayne and I joined this church. Of course Pastor Amy's very insightful sermons and Bryans free concerts have added to the allure. So I'm not here to tell you anything new, but to encourage you to continue the good work that's being done here.

Your love is lifting me higher. It's time for a short intermission while I set up a few things for the second half of my message.

2nd Half

The Hate has no Home Here flag along with its 5 hearts represents a message of powerful inclusivity, peace, and tolerance. It is a rejection of hate speech, intolerance, and violence, and a commitment to creating a safe and welcoming environment for everyone, regardless of their background, identity, religious beliefs, heritage, sexuality, gender, race, political party, or who they voted for.

Peace Sign – In 1958 Gerald Holtom designed the symbol for Nuclear Disarmament. The design was modeled after naval semaphore flags. N, 2 flags at a 45° for nuclear and D, one flag pointed

straight up and one pointed straight down for disarmament. Remember how we had atomic bomb drills and we hid under our desks. The good news is not one kid died in school from a Nuclear bomb. Now kids hide to escape bullets. 12 children die each day in America from gun violence. The V sign was the victory sign during WWII. In the 60's and 70's it symbolized peace in opposition to the Vietnam war. The peace sign on this flag is a visual reminder that peace and kindness should be the norm, not the exception.

Black Lives Matter – The Ku Klux Klan, with its long history of violence, is the oldest and most infamous of American hate groups. Although Black Americans have typically been the Klan's primary target, adherents also attack Jewish people, persons who have immigrated to the United States, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. The Klan used violent intimidation to prevent Black Americans – and any white people who supported Reconstruction – from voting and holding political office.

In the 1920s in Indiana, 1 in 3 males were members of the Klan. A group recorded a record called the Bright Fiery Cross to the tune of The Old Rugged Cross. Trying to use religion as a basis for their beliefs. The burning cross signified the light of salvation on one hand and on the other the purification of the scourge of inferior races. A far cry from Love God, Love your Neighbor. While the KKK membership has declined in recent years. Some people have simply changed their white hoods to Red hats. When I see yard signs like White Lives matter it usually shows me a lack of empathy. Of course they matter. Listen to what President Lyndon B. Johnson said to Congress on March 15, 1965.

“For Negroes are not the only victims. How many white children have gone uneducated, how many white families have lived in stark poverty, how many white lives have been scarred by fear, because we have wasted our energy and our substance to maintain the barriers of hatred and terror?”

Pride and Transgender – Native Americans recognized five genders, female, male, two spirited female, two spirited male, and transgendered. Two-spirits and transgendereds were highly revered throughout pre-invasion America. They thought a person who was able to see the world through the eyes of both genders at once was a gift from the creator.

In hindsight it's no wonder that we showed up on the doorstep of this church 18 months ago. God always seems to put us where we need to be. Because 6 months ago we learned that our grandson was transitioning. So we now have a Granddaughter. The contents of her heart no longer conflict with the image of her physical being. Finding her rightful place in life has made her joyful and happy. Why would anyone want to take that away? Why the hate and fear? It's good to be in a safe and understanding place.

The Old Testament contains 613 commandments for people to follow. The New Testament teaches that Christ's death and resurrection fulfilled the law, which is why its many rules and regulations have never applied to Christians.

Jesus came to earth to teach us. To simplify the Bible. To love God, to love our neighbor. But people hide behind scripture they do not fully understand. Like in Leviticus 18:22 that says you shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. Watch this video addressing this issue.-----

The word “homosexual” did not appear in any English-language Bible until the 1946 Revised Standard Version. Which disregarded at least 2000 years of history. It was lost in translation. The argument I make about the 6 passages that address same-sex eroticism in the bible is more than likely about the sexual exploitation of young men by older men, a practice called pederasty. There is no evidence that in any way speaks to same-sex relationships of love and mutuality.

US Flag – Patriotism is much more than hugging a flag or mounting a flag to your truck and driving around. The last half of the pledge of allegiance says one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all. Everyone in this country whether a citizen or people immigrating deserve and are entitled

to justice. Remember JFK. Ask not what your country can do for you- ask what you can do for your country.

Elon Musk the world's richest person became a Senior advisor to the president. He stated that "The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy.

As Christians it's our greatest Strength. It is what propels us to Love God, and to Love our neighbor. The DOGE cuts to our institutions like U.S.Aid are crippling so many people that will be left hungry and sick. We need to fight and lift these people up. Jesus said; Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' We need to Speak out.

The elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or DEI is the lack of empathy. It is drag on people of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, veterans and people with disabilities. Authoritarian regimes try to suppress education and diverse ideas as a means to maintain their power and control. We need to lift all people up. We need to continue to speak out.

In aviation the opposing force of lift is drag. The opposing force of Love is Hate. So we must Lift up our neighbors and lead with love. Before I conclude this message let's watch Melanie. During the 2nd half of the video if you are able please stand and join in.

In Conclusion, when a pilot is on approach to landing, if there are a lot of distractions like stormy weather, lightning, turbulence, and darkness. A pilot must keep their focus on the flight instruments keeping the crosshairs centered on the glide path and course. Faith in the instruments and staying on course brings everyone to a safe landing.

The world and our country is seeing a lot of kaos, stormy weather, turbulence and uncertainty. See that cross. It reminds me of the cross hairs on the flight instruments. We must keep our faith in Jesus, stay on course by loving God, By loving our neighbors.

Pilots live by check lists. So let's do the following checklist together as a crew. I'll read each item and you respond with checked.

Keep fighting for the good...Keep showing up....Keep loving... Keep giving back....Keep being kind.....Keep being brave.....Keep caring.....Keep trying new things.....Keep showing grace.....Keep On ...

The Keep On Check list complete

This world needs you to believe in the good..... Together we will make a safe landing. Amen