

**November 6, 2015**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon - "Stand Firm"**

---

One of the great privileges of ministry is the opportunity to spend time reading and reflecting on scripture.

I know that few people have time in their day to do this but for me it is an integral part of my life.

This past week, as the world seemed to be whirling out of control I was able to sit with Psalm 145, with Haggai's prophecy and with the Thessolonian's passage; to be reminded of God's steadfast love for us.

Taking these three readings together, a consistent message of hope emerges.

From Psalm 145 written as a song of praise of God from a grateful people: *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

From Haggai, written for the Israelites returning from exile to their former home in Jerusalem provide hope in the restoration of the temple: *Take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.*

Paul's encouragement to the Thessolonians as they endure persecution, false teachings and fear that they have missed the Lord's return: *So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.*

As world events or personal events overwhelm you, you have these promises to hold onto.

I started to think about what the letter to the Thessolonians might mean to us today.

How might we "Stand Firm and hold fast to the traditions that we were taught?"

What have we been taught? What lessons endure? What do we stand for today?

All of this reflection prompted me to think about 'Christian Values.'

A Google search for 'Christian Values' generated 122,000,000 responses.

As you can imagine there are many versions of 'Christian's values' some of which we would not recognize, others that resonate deeply with our beliefs and our lives.

One listing pointed out:

“The values taught in the Bible are often the opposite of worldly values: kindness and respect for all people instead of power;

humility instead of status;

honesty and generosity instead of wealth;

self-control instead of self-indulgence;

forgiveness instead of revenge.

Christian values promote peace and good will among people in accordance with the purposes of God.

We will never achieve perfection in this life, but those people who strive to obey God often find a sense of joy and peace that no worldly rewards can match!”

I thought this theology was a close description to the goals we set for ourselves.

Another listing, taken from a book by the same name, offered ‘Ten Christian Values Every Kid Should Know.’ These included:

1. Faith in God
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Self-control and Moderation
5. Honesty and Integrity
6. Kindness and Compassion
7. Contentment and Thankfulness
8. Patience and Perseverance
9. Peace and Humility
10. Loyalty and Commitment

Of course, I couldn’t leave a study of Christian values without visiting St. Augustine, one of my favorites.

Augustine was one of the most prolific Christian writers of the 5th century and his theological reflections have remained constant to this day.

He identified four cardinal virtues which define the Christian life:

- Prudence – ability to judge between actions with regard to appropriate actions at a given time;
- Justice – proper moderation between the self-interest and the rights and needs of others;
- Restraint or Temperance – practicing self-control, and moderation;
- Courage or Fortitude – forbearance, endurance, and ability to confront fear and uncertainty, or intimidation.

Our own United Church of Christ website carries a video which identifies these as our core values:

- We are committed to and remain open to hearing God's ancient story anew and afresh;
- We are attentive to God's creative movement in the world;
- We are the church of continuing testament;
- We advocate justice for all;
- God's love knows no borders;
- We are a people of extravagant welcome;
- Lives are changed through global partnerships and experiences;
- We are vital communities of worship and celebration;
- We are changing lives;

A somewhat more conservative site – theologically speaking, not politically speaking, listed the biblical teachings of Jesus as the basis for these values:

Love of God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (an excerpt from the Deut.6:5), -Matthew 22:37

Fidelity in marriage: "Whom God has joined together let no man put asunder", derived from - Matthew 19:6

Renunciation of worldly goods: "Gather not your riches up upon this earth, for there your heart will be also", (Matthew 6:21)

Renunciation of violence: "If a man strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek", (Luke 6:29)

Forgiveness of sins: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us", (Matthew 6:12)

Unconditional love: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Luke 6:27-28)

Finally, the Evangelical Alliance Faith & Politics contained the important reminder "To some extent the focus on corporate and personal core values is consistent with biblical ways of thinking where the issue is never just what one does but how and why it is done."

I share all of these resources with you as a way to encourage you to think deeply about who you are and what you stand for.

Stand firm in what you believe and what you have been taught.

Know that you are part of something much larger than yourself.

You are part of a community of faith that has endured for centuries rooted in the promise of God's steadfast, eternal love.

As you leave here today and embark on a week where we will elect a new president on Tuesday and honor our veterans who have defended our values, often with their lives on Friday, keep Paul's words to the Ephesians in your heart and mind:

Ephesians 4:29-32 "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of your redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you.

May God bless you and bless our beloved United States of America.