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It's a wonderful day and I'm really honored to keep this tradition going of preaching on the first Sunday of the New Year it's a great joy. And also I'm very proud of the Huskies because they played four greatest teams of America played football yesterday and the Huskies were there and they played with distinction and we have a lot to be proud of their.

And also today in worship service is a colleague of mine who is a colleague during my most of my time here at UPC, Ark Beals, he was minister of Urban and global mission and he's here in the church today I hugged him this morning and I'm just so happy that he's here. So one of the great pastors in the history of our church is Ark Beals by the way he had a very famous thing it was a dangerous one but people would go in to see him and we had this saying in the staff that Ark Beals, first Ark beals believes that God loves you so he would always say God loves you and a then Ark beals has a plan for your life. And we have a lot of people that were sent to various mission challenges because that wonderful truth that God loves you and Ark beals has a plan for your life and he had a plan for my life too we had such a grand time together during our time as pastors together.

I have a great text for you today its first Thessalonians the 1st chapter verses 2-6, and it's a great encouragement text in the new testament, as a matter of fact did you know the very first book of the new testament is first Thessalonians that Saint Paul wrote and so here you have the first sentences of Saint Paul in letters that he wrote to the churches in the 1st century Christian church and this is one of the great ones, its an encouragement text and in this text Paul gives thanks for a group of ordinary people who lived in Thessaloniki he had been there with them and now gone on to probably he wrote this letter from Corinth where he was from 2 and half years and he is thankful for this people, and in this he thanks them for their faith we get the four great words of the Christian relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith he thanks him for their faith, their love their hope and then this fourth surprise word their joy those four words. And they become very major words to Saint Paul he uses them a lot and he thanks the Thessalonians for those words for those great ingredients of their own journey with Christ.

But Paul is a teacher too, so he not only thanks God for their faith, their love, their hope and their joy but he adds a word to each one as teacher and helps us really understand what those words mean and what they would meant to the Thessalonians too. So let me read the text to you cause he adds a word to each of those great words, he says, "we always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers constantly remembering before our God and Father your," now here they come "your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfast of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" and then that fourth word, "and in spite of" the word here, the RSP says persecution but that is not the right word there's a different word here it's the word flexes in spite of intense pressure and in spite of intense pressure which the people had in Thessaloniki you receive the word with joy so there's the fourth word.

Your work of faith, Paul the teacher now adds a word to each of these great words well you know work is the Greek word Erg it's a word that's coming to the scientific vocabulary of science because Erg is the unit of energy and physics but it's the Greek word that's uses it a lot. The work of faith, its basic because we would have no faith at all without the work of God as Carl Barton loves to say "The word and the work are inseparable in Jesus Christ" you cannot separate what Jesus says that's why he cannot just treated as a teacher you cannot what Jesus says from what he did, work mean Erg means unit of energy means an event that happens because of something and the work of Jesus Christ happened at the cross it happened when he defeated satan and he defeated death and he absorb human sins all in that great incredible work moment, and there would be no faith without that work so he says your work of faith because also this is second thing to understand about faith, faith first of all is a decision that we make. Maybe we start reading the new testament or reading the gospel records, maybe we're in a small bible study group that's what it happened for me and you met Jesus in the new testament, you met him in Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, you met him by anticipation in the old testament and you met him and he won your respect so that you came to respect him that's a few inches away from faith, and then you decide find, take the promises that he gave that what he thought what he said and you decide to make an event of it in your life, to trust it to put your weight down upon it.

Saint Paul uses this word work decisively in the Philippian letter, in the Philippian letter he has a great song its very famous it's called the Philippian song where he tell about how Christ died in our behalf though he is equal of God he humiliated himself came to the cross and died at the cross, and then the guardians highly exalted him and given him a name above every name that the name of Christ every knee should bow that great song. Did you know the next sentence after that song is this in Philippians 2 Paul says "as you've always listen to me, listen to me now with fear and trembling the salvation you have from this great work of Christ make an event of it work it out! For God is at work to will and to make this happen to this good decision in your life" so that's the sentence that follows that marvelous great song. So he says "with fear and trembling the salvation that you have from him work it out" Erg the same word work it out make an event of it, act it out in your life for God is at work in you to do and fulfill his good decision so God works you work. And so Paul teaches about faith and just as wonderful tribute he give to these Thessalonians, notice your work of faith you have made an event of what you've trust you believe in what he said now you put your weight down on it.

Then you Labor of love, now it's interesting that's sounds almost the same word but it's not it's a different word, the word for labor compost is used always to the new testament to refer to heavy work or sweaty work, it's a very earthy word as a matter of fact our Lord uses it in one of his most famous promises "come into me all you that labor" uses that word and they use it twice and are over worked our heavy lady with the RSP puts it, "those of you who work but work very hard come on to me and I will give you pause" and then he invites us to take his yolk upon with us. So Jesus uses that very word that heavy work and it's interesting that Paul decides to attach that word to love, Love is heavy lifting Love is hard work it's a decision you make because you've experienced God's love because beloved let us love one another, because we've been loved by any vent love by Jesus Christ what he did on our behalf and now where at physically concretely

love it's hard work. Our Lord makes it very vivid for us in a parable in 10th chapter of Luke he has a question asked of him by a young lawyer. The lawyer comes up to him and says "teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life" and Jesus said to him "what is written in the law how do you read it" and the lawyer got the right answer he said "you shall love the Lord your God" notice that's the great levinicle statement of the fulfillment of the law "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with you soul with strength with your mind and your neighbor as yourself". So then the lawyer said to him the first Jesus said "you have given the right answer now do this you'll live" but wanting to justify himself he asked Jesus "and who is my neighbor?" that's a huge tribal question as you know its bothering everybody in the world today "who is my neighbor, who should I pay attention to? Who should I care about, who is my neighbor that I'm supposed to love?" And then at that point Jesus tells his most famous parable, a parable about a man that went down between Jerusalem and Jericho and he fell among robbers rotter's, and in the rotter's he our Lord puts it very powerfully they beat him they strip him naked and they left him half dead on the side of the road and then two people come by and its interesting our Lord shows no interest in them whatsoever, a priest and a Levi came by and they pass by and they don't have anymore part to play in story they're finished they missed out but there's a third man who comes whose a Samaritan, and then our Lords says the Samaritan went to the man but it's before he said he went to him he said he had compassion for him, now that is one of the strongest of the love words in the new testament it's the Greek word Splegamothe comes from "gut" it comes from your bowel from who you are of what you feel. It is a word that is very strong its used by our Lord in this great text he had compassion he felt love to wore him notice its earthy its practical it's from his body he felt love for this man, not just that he did it intellectually but he felt it from his inside and then he went and he helped him he put olive oil on him he put wine on him, a little bit of first aid notice he doesn't do brain surgery, he does a little first aid over play this is a parable and he doesn't take the man to his home for the rest of his life he just does a little first aid but it's risky because maybe the rotter's are still around then he lifts him to his own burrow to his own donkey that's a big job, the man is half dead he's been stripped naked so has to put something over him and put him on his donkey and if this man wearing Levis imagine how they're torn now, because he's working with the rocks and the sky is in the side of the rocks in fact maybe they used rocks to beat this man so now he's got jagged holes in his jeans he's got a sweaty t-shirt as he takes this man and puts him on the donkey and brings him to an inn. The Samaritan himself is worst for ware but he bring him to inn and says "take care of him, I'll be back in another day or so if I owe anything for then I'll pay you then" and then he leaves that's it. But notice when he comes in to the inn he doesn't look very presentable himself except that he brings this man said "I will pay whatever is due after when I get back" that's love, and by the way you know we live in an age now where we can have imaginary love like this we can go to and buy designer jeans by Ambercrombie and Fitch that are already torn, you don't have to tear your jeans caring for the guy on the side of the road,you can buy them and they're designer jeans Calvin Klein and they're designer they're already ripped and also in Calvin Klein you can buy t-shirt already sweat marked so that you could, instead you don't have to go to the gym the t-shirt already has a sweat mark on it and it's marvelous that we have that kind of imaginary signs of hard work what we've worked so hard my designer jeans can prove it to you but you know this is better than designer jeans. This guy has got a torn pants he's got a sweaty t-shirt because he had labor of love, see, and Jesus wants us to know that, that love is labor, love is hard work and he puts to the end as the second great word of our journey with Christ, we experience his love and

that was hard work love on the part of our Lord as he died in the cross on our behalf and now we have practical hard work love as well.

Now the third word, your endurance of hope this as you know is one of my very favorite words, I first heard it from powered but my great friend who just died a few months ago and he, I heard him give a talk and what she said "the word that means the most to me is Uppomano to hang in there" it means under stay, stay under, hold on don't give up endure. That is the New Testament word for endurance Paul uses it many times he love this word Uppomano it's not triumphant, it's very earthy but it's very hanging on surviving staying put its faithful presence in the midst of the world. And that's the word that Saint Paul uses here now, you have the Uppomano of hope he combines it with hope, hope hangs in there hope stays hope doesn't run away it holds on with you it stays. By the way hope does morethan that too it's also is optimistic, David Baron Harper had a wonderful line he put in his letters and papers from present, he talked about hope as the view from underneath which is the Uppomano hanging in there, but then he gave the other side of hope when he said this but and he uses the optimism to describe to this side of hope he said its wiser to be pessimistic it's a way of avoiding disappointment and ridicule but the essence of optimism is not as view of the present but is inspiration for life and hope when other give in. And the he talks about this the optimism that has will for the future should never be despise even if its proved wrong hundred times it is health and vitality and the sick man has no business to impute it and then he goes on to say "some people think that there is in biased hope for any better future they think that the meaning of the present events is chaos and disorder and catastrophe, and therefore resignation is surrender of all responsibility for future generations some say to that. But it may lead to the day of judgement will dawn tomorrow and in that case Barn Harper says ' then we'll gladly stop working for a better future but not before'" and that's his definition of hope, hope is Uppomano its hanging in there but hope is also hoping for a better future.

I love "The Pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan and in Pilgrim's Progress we have these amazing characters that are kind of, that are made allegorical like we need a character name Mr. Faithful unfortunately he dies in vanity fairsidy because he is burned at the state, because this was written during the time when people were burned at the state. So for his faith he died but there are other characters that are with pilgrim after that and one of them is hopeful, hopeful is with pilgrim and they were at vanity fair together and they move on on the king's highway and they have a raging river they have to get through so they became very exhausted an then they find a meadow where they can fall asleep, and they fall asleep hopeful and Christian fall asleep. And then they discover when they wake up that they're on the grounds of giant despair, his territory they had no right to fall asleep there. And so he takes them captive and puts them in his dungeon. This is one of the most marvelous parts of pilgrim's progress, Christian and hopeful are put in the dungeon and then they're beaten by this giant despair, by the way his wife's name is Di-finance how do you like that? Uh.. She's the one who tells him to advise the two pilgrims that they should do way with their lives because they'll never get out of here. It's an interesting portrayal of depression that is given by John Bunyan. So he says here's hopeful and Christian are in the castle of giant despair in his dungeon and the giant tries to beat them with a cudgel but he then one problem he begins to have fits and gets weak in the middle of beating them so he doesn't quite finish em' off but he does this 3 times he beats them and he says " the next time I'm gonna really finish you off so you should like my wife says you should do way with yourselves

because you'll never get out of here". And hopeful plays an interesting role with Christian, hopeful encourages Christian to stay there and hope that maybe the giant will lose his energy finally and they'll get out, or the giant will forget something and they'll be able to sneak out and so that's what hopeful tells Christian, and nevertheless he hangs in with Christian and at one point when Christian wonders if he should do away himself, Christian hears from hopeful "oh no! you can't do that, that's against the law of God you're not allowed to kill yourself that is against God's law so don't do that don't do that" and so Christian decides not to do that. Then in the middle of the night after four days in the dungeon Christian wakes up "what a fool I am I have a key in my bosom called promise. You see that giant had searched them but he didn't search him well enough, "I have a key around my neck called promise that I'm sure will open any door" and at that point hopeful plays another role hopeful says "Good! Try it out see if it'll work!" see that's the optimism that Baron Harper "try it out see if it'll work!" and so I love this part of the endurance progress they go to the first door in the middle of the night now and then they use the key and the door opens easily and they go to the second gate and it opens easily, Wow! I love it! Then they come to the third door and John Bunyan puts this way and that lock went damnable hard yet the key did open it. I carved them in driftwood you know. I carve things on driftwood would be alien in this summer and I carved it. That lock went damnable hard that was a lot of words to put in to a driftwood too. That lock went damnable hard yet the key did open it but when it opened it made such a screeching sound that it woke up the giant, and his wife said "you better go after them" and the giant goes after them and guess what he has one of his fits and loses strength and they got out. Despair is not as powerful as it says it is and that's what John Bunyan is teaching us but hopeful plays that role he plays the double role one of hanging in there with Christian and cautioning Christian from doing anything foolish and then when he finds that key it's hopeful who says "go for it let's go for it and try to get those doors open" that's hope.

And then there's the third word, the fourth word. The fourth word is in spite of affliction, the word by the way is *Flexes* in Greek it is affliction in spite of affliction or intense pressure would probably be the best English translation of *flexes* affliction. In spite of intense pressure you receive the word of the Lord with joy, Joy... That's an amazing word, what is joy the word "chara" in Greek is literally the word surprise. But it's used positively is translated Joy, as a matter of fact C.S. Lewis when he told his story of his life wrote a biography an auto biography called "Surprise by Joy" which is a play on words and Lewis was a philologist so he knew that it's surprise by surprise. I was surprised joy showed up I didn't expect it, I never expected it it showed up. And you know it's interesting that's what Saint Paul puts as the fourth great word, the fourth great word of the Christian walk, Faith, The work of Faith, The labor of Love, The endurance of hope and the Surprise of joy. And in the midst of affliction the Surprise of Joy, J.R. Tolkien help me more than anybody else to understand this he was explaining really in a way the happy ending of the great Lord of the Rings, his great story the trilogy that he wrote. Return of the king the last of that trilogy is probably one of the greatest books I ever read in my life. And he is explaining the joy that it happens and he puts it this way, he says "The surprise of joy" I'm quoting from Tolkien now "is not escapist, is not fugitive it is miraculous grace it's the sudden joyous turn" and that's the title I gave for today's sermon The sudden joyous turn.

Listen what he goes on to say "it does not deny the existence of sorrow or failure, the possibility of those is necessary for joy to be the joy of deliverance, but it can give to a child" I love that he

put this in “it can give to a child or a man who hears it when the turn comes the joyous turn comes it causes that man or child to catch his breath it gives him a beat and a lifting of the heart as joy”. Joy... By surprise and Paul saw that Paul has Joy in his life and he shares it with Thessalonians they had it too even in the midst of a riot that occurred in Thessaloniki there was a sort of sudden turn of joy when something turned out better than they expected. It's the happy ending, it's the good, I'll read Tolkien says again “the surprise of joy is not escapist is not fugitive it is miraculous grace the sudden joyous turn.” You know the work of faith is great cause you have to make your faith actually you have to do something with your faith and not just believe something.

Do you know from this very pulpit a number of years ago I taught you all how to ski, downhill ski. I've had people tell me that I helped them actually to get courage to go to gloomy paths and to fall a few times to try to do follow my because I said skiing is very simple because there's only three rules to remember, you don't have a lot of rules to remember only three and if you follow the three rules you can do downhill skiing and I promise you to form this very pulpit fact, many of you took me up on it and uh... and I also promise that if you follow these rules you won't break your knees you won't get a break, you may have other problems like a jammed thumb and stuff like that when you fall but you won't get a broken knee if you follow these rules, here are the three simple rules in skiing, you have to go to the top of the hill first you can't ski at the bottom you have to go to top by the chair lift up that's itself is challenging but you can do it with a help, they now have quad chairs five people can help you off so can get up there. So you get to the top of the hill the first rule you have to face down the hill not across the hill everybody thinks that I'm gonna do a lot try bruises that's why youths have worst way to learn to ski cause you're making all the wrong moves when you do that you have to face down the hill. Second rule is you have to have enough speed to execute the turn, okay, as these rules are getting to be a little counter intuitive a little bit against what you think “shouldn't I start really slow?” No you have to have enough speed to execute you to turn. So you need to have some speed when you go down. Now the third rule is the most important rule, you must put your weight on the downhill ski, not the uphill ski if your weight is on the uphill ski you'll have the terrible falls that's how you break your ankle or break your knee, you have to have your weight on the downhill ski, the only problem is this counter intuitive you say if I'm gonna ski I want to get as close to the mountain as possible, no you wanna be as far from the mountain as possible, you wanna go down the mountain and you wanna put your weight on the downhill ski which means your uphill ski is gonna be lighter and that's how you turn. And by the way the fourth rule is you never stop you always turn, never say stop never do that to a kid tell em' Turn, because you turn that's how you stop. So that's skiing I said from this pulpit I didn't take very long you've all learn to ski now, it's a three simple steps there's only one problem with the three rules they go contrary to your instinct, your instinct is stay close to the mountain, your instinct is to go slow, your instinct is go across the hill no go down the hill put your weight on the downhill ski and then you can turn and then switch downhill ski and you can turn again, wow it's not bad at all, and that's how you learn to ski. But notice what happens what you had to do was you had to trust the truth, the truth of the ski instructor you had to trust the truth of the physics of skiing and that physics means weight has to be on the downhill ski, and so you trust that and put your weight on it. That's the work of faith, the work of faith notice what Paul says “because of your salvation work it out, put your weight down on the salvation you have from Jesus Christ for God is at work in your life” he promises

that. He's at work in your life you work you put your weight down, I became a Christian that way I was at a retreat in lake Tahoe South Moore UC Berkeley and Doctor Robert Boyd Munger my beloved pastor at Berkeley whose later was on the staff here at this church as well. He put it this way, he says "when on the basis of what you know about Jesus Christ you're willing to trust in his trustworthiness then you're ready to become a Christian then you're ready to put your weight down on the truth" The truth is you're not right to be the Lord of your life I realized today there's a lot out there that what you need to be is the Lord of your life and you don't need anybody to tamper with that you need to be the one who makes all the decisions for your life and you need that. No it's better to trust in the faithfulness and the truth of Jesus Christ, and trust in his reign in your life. But it's a little bit counter intuitive to trust him to trust and he says put your weight on the downhill ski, do it, a little speed, do it, face down the hill rather than across the hill, do it. And then you know what happens the funny thing that happens and I love the way Tolkien puts it "is this joy that happens is not escapist is not fugitive its miraculous grace, it's a sudden joyous turn" and when you're able to turn on a mountain that's the moment when kids start singing songs while they're skiing, I'm seating on top of the world when you can turn, when you can turn then you can stop then you can stop theoretically up in front of people too spray them with snow, but you can do it when you can turn and when you can turn because you have your weight on the downhill ski when you trust the Lord and then you get the Joy, isn't it interesting the joy comes fourth, first the Work of faith, The Labor of Love, The Uppomano of hope, and then the Sudden turn of joy when you put it all together and it works.

Heavenly Father thank you for this great text from Saint Paul, and thank you that we are here as your people and now as we come to the time to the Lord's supper we celebrate the work of your faithfulness that makes our work possible. Bless us in Christ name we pray. Amen