

OPENING

You might have seen the news article this week, with the title:

“This pastor fell for a TikTok stunt and sparked a debate on Christian charity.”

It had the subheading: “An influencer’s test of churches went viral, rewarding the generous, shaming the stingy and raising questions about how houses of worship should respond to random calls for help.”¹ (*Washington Post*, this Thursday.)

What had happened was that a woman from Kentucky called up a series of churches, claiming: “I have a 2-month-old baby. And I ran out of formula last night. I was wanting to see if y’all could help with formula.” She then taped the church’s responses and subsequently posted them on her TikTok account.

No, St. Timothy’s did not receive such a call. But I bring that story up, because we *could have* and we do get calls *like that* all the time.

And I bring it up because our readings this morning are kind of asking the same thing: “What are we supposed to do as we wait... for God... to show up? When/how will the Christ appear in our midst and what will the reckoning be?” The Israelites are asking that sort of question. Paul’s community in Thessalonica was asking it. The people in Jesus’ time were sure as heck asking that question: “Teacher, when will *this* be, and what will be the sign that *this* is about to take place?”²

So, how do we as Christians, as people of faith, as this congregation of St. Timothy’s in 2025, what do we do as we wait for God?

¹ Tatum Hunter and Michelle Boorstein. 11/13/2025. *The Washington Post* [This pastor fell for a TikTok stunt and sparked a debate on Christian charity - The Washington Post](#)

² Luke 21.7 (Emphasis added)

LECTIONARY

Now this influencer, clearly, is not God.

(Although that article kind of refers to her as such, as she is “rewarding the generous, shaming the stingy” ... I thought that was God’s job!) She did not even, in fact, have a baby in need of formula. It was all a stunt. People pointed fingers and it snowballed, some people said: “This is evidence that the Church is not doing its job.” Others lambasted the women for her dishonesty.

But my guess is that we are all haunted, to some degree, by the beggar at the traffic intersection, by the homeless person on the street, by the mother asking for formula.

The scripture that comes to mind, for me... maybe for you is Jesus in Matthew:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”³

But let’s go, instead, to today’s reading and to Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians and its most famous verse: “Anyone unwilling to work, should not eat.”⁴

Let’s go there because it deals with feeding and because, I kid you not, it is cited in this article about the women with the formula as an example of how some churches justify not supporting social welfare, misinterpreting Paul as saying something like: “God helps those who help themselves.”

Now the Old Testament tradition of hospitality and the Feeding of the 5000 clearly deny that Paul’s words should be used as an economic ideology. That has not stopped people from trying. In our own country, all the way back to the beginning at Jamestown, John Smith cited this piece of Scripture in a speech to his fellow colonists but, significantly, he did mean it for those who were sick or injured. More recently, it was used in the 1936 Soviet Constitution, of all places

³ Matthew 25.40.

⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:10

and, apparently, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church had trouble convincing the Russian people of the Biblical origin of the phrase.

“Anyone unwilling to work, should not eat.”

Paul’s letter is written to a community that is eagerly awaiting Jesus’ return. And they are getting antsy, some are misbehaving, some are overcorrecting. Paul tries to give them assurance. Among Paul’s readers, there are apparently some who are idle and disorderly, straying from Paul’s teachings. On the other end of the spectrum, there were these “busy bodies” who were “minding everyone’s business but their own” and “never working but always busy.” That sounds like a perfect definition of an Instagram/ TikTok influencer, someone never working, always busy.

Paul was a gifted leader of people, and he understood the value of a livelihood and the dignity and sanctity of work itself. Follow me then here: perhaps Paul, instead of saying what *should* happen, actually *is* describing what *does* happen in our communities with regards to work and food. That is: “Anyone who does not work, does not eat.” His advice then is not a formula for punishment, but a hard-boiled assessment of the reality of living in a community. At this point the phrase becomes *descriptive* of the world that is, rather than *prescriptive* about the world that might be.⁵

We can all recall situations where, if everyone else does the work, then you won’t feel fed or nourished. We might have been in situations where we prevent others from doing the work, and, as a consequence, others cannot grow or be fully whole. In fact, the very act of preventing people who can work to not work is itself demeaning.

The good news is that there is a lot of work to do, enough for everyone. If only we spent as much time as we do judging others and whether or not they are

⁵ Pringle, Neta. “Pastoral Perspective” *Feasting on the Word (Year C, Volume 4)* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 306.

worthy of receiving food, if this Tiktoker and her followers would put all the effort on this storm of recrimination and blame and instead focus on feeding people, people might get fed.

Truly, there is enough work to go around. We don't need to invent the sick, or the lonely, or the hungry.

If you don't work towards feeding people, people will go hungry.

If we don't support our churches, people don't eat

If we don't support our government programs and those who administer them, people don't eat.

What we do instead, is we support the rage and blame and shame industry. We feed that. We worship "that." You and me and everyone, we worship at the altar of celebrity, and social media, and shame, and politicization and you name it."

It's an idol, this thing that we worship, it takes so much, and it gives so little back.

But we love it, and so we feed it and feed from it, we offer ourselves up to it because it makes us feel good.

SHIFT

We need to of course, stop trying to feed that false God and instead concentrate on feeding one another, and getting fed by the God that loves and values all of us.

From our readings, we can take comfort that this is not new, it's just been hyper-charged with technology, and that everyone, at every place and time, is waiting and avoiding, and hoping, and fearing... something.

From just this week at church, a parishioner came into my office and asked if I needed gift-cards. I can guarantee they did not read this article. Angels unaware.

I mention the importance of us getting fed. I mean the Eucharist. We hand out bread here every Sunday, it's free. When I started here, and this is how serious people take the Eucharist, people sometimes came to me and said for this reason or that,

their were others in the church who they had a broken relationship. More than one person said “I cannot look people in the eye. Even at communion.” That was a painful and honest admission and I did not need to tell them because they knew already: “If you have not done the work of reconciliation, it does not taste the same.”

“If you don’t do the work, you don’t get fed.”

In the same way, if you are able, and you are not committed to helping those who need help, I am not sure that the Bread here is going to feed you.

CONCLUSION

How did the churches do, by the way, in the Tiktok stunt from this article?

Some did all right, passing this test.

Others, not so much. Joel Osteen’s megachurch in Houseton, for example, failed miserably and glee went up in the land.

There it is, I am judging.

It all sounds scary, all this talk of the end of times, the prospect of Jesus being able to show up at any time, and whether we would be able to pass the test, from Malachi to Jesus to Today.

Judgement sounds really scary. Unless you know the Judge.

We should be Eager for judgement:

Come Holy Spirit Come

Oh Lord I want to be in that number.

AMEN