

"DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 19, 1997

"DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS"

TEXT: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with the present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica".
(II Timothy 4: 9, 10)

INTRODUCTION

Today's sermon is about Demas....a travelling companion of the Apostle Paul, at least for a while. We have three references in the writings of St. Paul to this man, Demas, who apparently made a promising beginning, but a poor ending....and who, in turn, has become something of a Biblical symbol of a person who never finished what he began.

Raise a hand if you've ever heard of Demas before....at other times and in other places. Some of you have....and that's good for I have preached on him before. Years ago....but I first encountered him way back in the early sixties when a colleague did a "first person" sermon on him. Unforgettable.

PAUL'S REFERENCES

Let's begin by taking a brief look at Paul's references to Demas, a partner in the faith. Those references come toward the end of Paul's ministry, indicating that Demas was with Paul in Rome. That sounds exciting. Rome. Paul. In one reference, Paul couples the name of Demas with that of Luke and John Mark and gratefully refers to the three of them as "my fellow workers". That's nice. In the next reference, Paul says, "Luke, the beloved physician and Demas greet you. (Colossians 4: 14). And then the final reference to Demas has some sad overtones for near the end of his letter to young Timothy, Paul pens this line that I touched on a moment ago,

"For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."
Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you...for he is very useful in serving me".

(II Timothy 4: 9-11)

Now...first let's give Betty Ann a nod for having handled all those New Testament names so nicely..."trippingly on the tongue"....you can tell she grew up in a Sunday School!

So far as we know, there is no more information available to us regarding Demas than these three reference. All we know is that this man was one of Paul's "lieutenants" in Rome who for a time shared the Apostle's work there, but at length deserted the cause and went back to Thessalonica. I wonder what happened?

IMAGINATION GOES TO WORK

From there on...the imagination goes to work and fills in the outline. Since Demas went back to Thessalonica can we not assume that's where his "roots" were? Had he been there among the converts in that Macedonian City when Paul first came through there preaching the Gospel of a Risen Christ? Had we come forward "in the altar call" following Paul's stirring message? Had he been one of the founders of the little church there....perhaps even opening up his home for small meetings of those who had been won to Christ and wanted to hear more? Did he share his time and talent to its growing strength?

And on one occasion, when Paul came back through Thessalonica to conduct a bit of church business did Demas take Paul over to one side after the Benediction and say,

"Look, Paul.....I've been giving this some thought....and if you can use me, I'd like to sign up and be a part of your team...that travels....I can do this...I can do that."

Anyway, somewhere along the line Paul met Demas, sized him up as a man who could be of help and welcomed him to his team. And can't you imagine how proud the members of "Old First Church, Thessalonica" must have been when their fellow member marched off in company with Paul, the great leader....and there were speeches and flowers and perhaps even a small purse at the coffee hour following the time of worship and study. What an honor!

And, for a time, one supposes, all went well and Demas thrilled to his new life - new sights and new adventures...never a dull moment. Imagine seeing Rome, the center of the world of his day. Then, too, there was a certain fascination about this man, Paul...why, he always seemed to emerge triumphant over his troubles and trials. There was a certain amount of prestige, too, about presenting your credentials as a member of Paul's team. Imagine how Demas must have felt as Paul placed a hand on his shoulder and said..."Nice going, Demas!"

But the day came when some of the newness wore off and now Paul was getting in more hot water....in prison and the power of Nero loomed large. As someone has put it, "you never know the strength of a tea bag until it's in hot water." It was more and more dangerous to be a follower of Christ. At times, the faith seemed so vague. The old town and those old ties tugged....tugged at the heart of Demas. One wonders...did Demas perhaps sit down one afternoon in Rome as he was enjoying a cup of capacino across from the Colosseum and pen Paul a note.

"Paul...I really hate to do this to you. You've been a good friend and buddy....but I just don't think there is where I belong. It just isn't for me. By the time you read this, I'll be on my way back to Thessalonica. Thanks for everything. And good luck to you in your work."

Of course we don't know the details. All we have is Paul's final and sad reference to Demas, "And Demas...in love with this present world, has deserted me". But even from such meager information, we are reminded once more than the Bible is not an unrealistic version of our human nature...not the result of collusion which omits that which is unfavorable, but rather the result of some honest reporting which pictures people as they were - and, we might add, as they are!

DEMAS IS NO STRANGER TO US

Our encounter with Demas here this morning first causes us to look outward and to admit that Demas is no stranger to our list of acquaintances. One of the darkest and most difficult moments in life occurs, I believe, when we realize that someone in whom we have placed trust and confidence has let us down...failed us, fooled us, frustrated us.

It should be of some "little comfort" to us in such low moments to remember that any adventure in faith in people will almost inevitably result in disappointment.

So Paul had his Demas and Jesus, of course, had his Judas. Here was the peerless "pioneer" of our faith and here was His tall First Lieutenant...both of them surrounding themselves with men who grew into the strongest kind of discipleship, but each of them choosing at least one person who is remembered today as a deserter, a defector, a disappointment.

So, remember that, you who are in business....the next time you are pondering the puzzling failure of some one you had chosen for a position of responsibility, a position of trust. And remember that, those of us in the Church, the next time we are disappointed in a person in whom we had confidence as a leader or holder of responsibility, or a position of trust. Remember this, too....in our friendships and relationships....when a recipient of love does not measure up in his or her response....and drifts off and away. Indeed, Jesus and Paul knew something about such risks of disappointment and desertion "in the ranks" of followers.

Now, in all of this, we need not reject or revise anything previously preached or said about the power of persistent love. Love still abides as the greatest and strongest force in the world, but it does need to be added that even the love of God is not coercive. God has given to each of us the dignity of freedom of choice and God Himself respects that dignity.

This is the fact which is unforgettably etched in Holman Hunt's masterpiece and great painting, "The Light of the World"....a copy of which hangs there in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. I always make a point of going to see it whenever I have the joy of being in London. Make a point some day of standing there in front of it, if you haven't. Jesus stands knocking at the door, but there is no latch on the outside of that door. The door can only be opened from the inside. So Jesus could not coerce Judas....even by the power of so great love, and neither could Paul coerce Demas.

And anyone who follows the Master's injunction to "love one another" may well meet up with Demas somewhere along the line, along life's path, even as did Paul. For we read...sadly....

"Demas, in love with this present world has deserted me".

FAILED TO FINISH

But now....the more difficult lesson from our brief encounter with Demas here today is to look inward and to ask ourselves whether we're a distant relative of this First Century man who lacked the ability to finish what he started. I suspect that all of us know something of the enthusiasm of splendid beginnings and then the doldrums of an uninspired continuance when we are sorely tempted to let down, give up, move on, and move out. It happens....sometimes it happens even in the church.

Years ago I came across a delightful line in the Reader's Digest offered by a mom whose son earned his spending money by mowing lawns. As one who mowed many a lawn as a teenager, I clipped it. She said that one Saturday morning her son was unusually slow in leaving the house and when she asked him about this delay, he simply said....

"Oh, mom....I'm just waiting 'till people get started, for you see, mom....I get most of my jobs from people who give up half way through...."

And that contribution is certainly in keeping with the spirit of the oft-quoted comment of the Duke of Wellington when someone asked him the secret of the English victory over the French forces at Waterloo. Said, he,

"We were brave.....five minutes longer....."

And who was it who said,

"The rock bottom thing about life is to keep on going when we don't want to keep on going, and to be willing to give up what isn't really that necessary".

Most of us know how easy it is to stop halfway through and how difficult it is to find that added perseverance that provides the margin of victory. Yes, as someone has pointed out,

"It's easier to build a reputation than it is to maintain it...." (Give me an 'AMEN' on that....if you agree).

YOU...in school. Are you Demas? Demas abounds in good intentions...does well on his achievement tests....becomes labeled as a "promising youth"...but you know how it is....the homework becomes sandwiched in between telephone and television, the outside activities pile up, the exams come along, the friends tug at you, the marking period begins and soon the records are recorded....the years pass and people shake their heads and say,

"I wonder whatever happened to Demas? Remember him in Junior High....he...she...had such promise in High School? I wonder what happened?"

YOU...who are busy....whether in vocation or some volunteer work. Are you a distant relative of Demas? You start a job to the tune of congratulations and good wishes. You take on a responsibility in your community, or bringing it home closer...in your church. After a few weeks or months at it, you run into hardships and headaches, criticisms, frustrations and problems and soon you're ready to "chuck it". Pass it on. Let someone else do it. Do not misunderstand me....I'm not pleading for that "blind endurance" which glues a person to a commitment or a position for ever and ever....but by and large, as a nation of workers, we're more inclined to be tentative than tenacious. Let me repeat that. And when things get dull or rough and the nice weather beckons, we pack up...pull out...rather than pushing on.

There's a bit of Demas in all of us. So...be careful. And watch out for those subtle temptations of this city, and not so subtle at times. They can do a job on you and pull you away from those values you had when you first came here and had in such great abundance. There really isn't a great deal we can do for Demas...he's gone, dead, but there is something we can do for ourselves, something we can do to strengthen our lives, our loyalties and resist temptation. I remember a poem from other days that has been running through my mind as I pulled my notes together for today's message on Demas and his life story.

Here it is...

"Across the fields of yesterday, he sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play - the lad I use to be.

And yet he smiles so wistfully, once he has crept within,
I wonder if he hopes to see the man I might have been".

I wonder.....I wonder how Demas might have felt had he repeated that poem to himself a few years after deserting the cause and leaving Paul. But I'm even more concerned about the effect it has on us today as we think of the tasks that touch our lives in the work of the Kingdom.

DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS

"And Demas...in love with the present world
has deserted me" wrote Paul. This city
takes its toll on all of our values, so be careful.

I'm sure of this.....that a religious faith of meaningful depth, a faith commitment undergirded by prayer and weekly worship and time given to serving others.....such can save one from falling away. For all of the imperfections of both pulpit and pew, God still uses worship to renew and to teach His children. Isaiah claimed this years and centuries ago when he wrote that beautiful line,

"They that WAIT upon the Lord shall renew their
strength!....you know the rest of it...."mount up
with wings, as eagles. RUN and not be WEARY. WALK
and not faint."

And this claim was validated by Jesus, Himself, in His own experience of prayer and of worship....so obviously renewing and restoring His energy and His perspective on things that the disciples came to Him and said,

"LORD....TEACH US how to pray....."

It says in the Bible, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me". Built on that and take that line out of here with you...to be put in that place in your life where you keep the things that are most important...to be taken out and looked at from time to time. "We can do all things in Him who strengthens us". With that as our anchor, we shall not end up drifting away like Demas, forsaking the Kingdom Enterprise that calls us and demands of us our very best. May it never be said of you....whatever your name....

"For.....in love with this present world,
has deserted me...and gone to...."

PRAYER

Make us sensitive, O God, to your presence...peace and power....at the end of this service of prayer and praise, of joy and of celebration.....brood over this congregation. Walk through this community of faith...touching, lifting and renewing each of us to higher levels of service, commitment and giving. Unite us and bless us collectively in our efforts in the tasks of kingdom building. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Demas:

II Tim. 4:

9-18

Colossians:-

4: 14

Phil. 3: 2

1: 23

"DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 19, 1997

VISITORS: Sunday, September 21, 1997 / HOMECOMING SUNDAY

Weather: Bright, cool and sunny. 68 degrees.

Attendance: 135 adults and 12 children. Total: 147

27 Year Comparison "stats"...

1996: 181	1987: 160	1978: 176
1995: 188	1986: 172	1977: 126
1994: 182	1985: 180	1976: 147
1993: 187	1984: 151	1975: 160
1992: 196	1983: 181	1974: 158
1991: 180	1982: 196	1973: 144
1990: 155	1981: 170	1972: 131
1989: 189	1980: 194	1971: 128
1988: 161	1979: 140	1970: 133

1. IT Mr. Fred D. Baldwin: 104 Butler Street
Brooklyn, New York 11231
Telephone: (718) 834 -9045

Pink card. Letter. Signed Visitor Card. Recently moved here from Mobile, Alabama. Dauphin Way United Methodist Church. Same church that Kelly Welch (Lee Raney) had a tie with. Mid to late forties. Coffee hour. Reminded PC of Charles Smith in appearance. Look for him to return. Just moved here and called to find out time of service.

2. IT Ms. Cynthia Young: 315 East 86th Street, Apt. 5JE
New York, New York 10028
Telephone: 722 -9216

Pink card. Letter. Signed visitor card and also Guest Book. United Methodist and interested in joining this church! Greeted at door by PC. Living in Yorkshire Towers. Here with Amanda Dean whose name is also on our list. (sisters ???)

3. IT Ms. Amy James: 123 East 83rd Street, Apt. 5D
New York, New York 10028
Telephone: 734 -8830

Pink card. Letter. Signed Guest Book. Telephone information provided us with a telephone number. PC can't place her....

(over)

4. OT Mr. Michael Moser: 12358 Strong Court
Fairfax, Virginia 22033
Telephone: (703) 591 -1210

Signed Guest Book. Out of town letter. Coffee hour. Intrigued with our Romanesque style of church architecture. United Methodist. PC told him about the Fairfax, Virginia warehouse PAUMC once owned. He is an art dealer. Visiting son here in NYC.... East 85th Street

5. OT Mr. Steven Passaro: 20 Leach Street
Lynbrook, New York
(516) 887 -6618

Out of town letter to the fiancée of Christine Schoenberg. Planning to get married! Engaged a week and a half ago. Attentive listener to sermon. Tall, gray, good looking and "great body" (BL's notes) Christine was sending a message about being married here...

6. IT Ms. Amanda Dean: no address for her.

With Cynthia Young. Name sounds familiar. Here previously, PC thinks. Young blond...quiet. No other information for now.

7. IT Ms. Lorianne Kujana: 1922 Grove Street, Apt. L 2
"LA" Brooklyn, New York ?????
Telephone: (212) 726 -1944

Pink card. Letter. Young adult. Mid to late twenties. Goes by the initials "LA". Coffee hour. Union College, Kentucky. Pat Henry was the connection. David Minkley spent time chatting with her at coffee hour. The other young adults also met her.

8. IT Ms. Tomas B. Talavera: 86 - 23 54th Avenue
Elmhurst, New York ???

Letter. Here from the Philippines and came with Lita Reyno. Coffee hour and met a number of people. PC chatted with him near end of coffee hour.

NOTES AND MESSAGES

Barbara Landon has offered to do the "door" with PC. Can't be here on the 12th of October. We'll need someone to step in for her that Sunday.

Dan Boone would like a copy of PC's sermon of Sunday morning, "On Cutting Your Losses". Judi Ferland: can you include him with a copy on Monday?

Gail Corvette will be at Thursday's Administrative Council Meeting. Has said yes to serving on it....perhaps we should ask her to take the minutes. PC and George will discuss this.

Teal Usher's pastoral prayer brought forth an appreciative response from quite a number of people. (Thank you, Teal).

Lyndon Woodside is having surgery on his ring finger on Thursday. Keep him in your thoughts...and prayers. Good to see Franklin Keysar in the congregation. Longtime member, Franklin, (1962) is having a battle with cancer, but seems to be doing OK....

Jim Bobick is "down" to read the scripture's next Sunday. PC will do the pastoral prayer and Teal will do the announcements. Sunday School is coming together nicely. Good to see Elizabeth Wolgemuth, Bob and Anette Lewis, John and Alix Lombardo, Mary Lou Risley....Dan and Will Lewis, too. Michael Gordon.

Anne Sappington's last Sunday is next Sunday...until February 1st. Off to NC...Myrtle Beach, Radio City Music Hall Show. We'll miss Anne and Alexandra!

BACK AGAIN FOR ANOTHER VISIT

1. Querida Samuel...with Jane Scatturo
2. Mina Hwang
3. S. K. Ayaram: coming to Adult Bible Class, I believe....do we call him "TREE" ??
4. Norman Wallace: made contact with Janet Ernst, I believe. Feeding Program.
5. Jeffrey Miles: coffee hour
6. Herb Lyman. Trish Whitcomb's husband. Adult Bible Class
- 7.

"DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
October 19, 1997

"DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS"

TEXT: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with the present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica".
(II Timothy 4: 9, 10)

INTRODUCTION

Today's sermon is about Demas....a travelling companion of the Apostle Paul, at least for a while. We have three references in the writings of St. Paul to this man, Demas, who apparently made a promising beginning, but a poor ending....and who, in turn, has become something of a Biblical symbol of a person who never finished what he began.

Raise a hand if you've ever heard of Demas before....at other times and in other places. Some of you have....and that's good for I have preached on him before. Years ago....but I first encountered him way back in the early sixties when a colleague did a "first person" sermon on him. Unforgettable.

PAUL'S REFERENCES

Let's begin by taking a brief look at Paul's references to Demas, a partner in the faith. Those references come toward the end of Paul's ministry, indicating that Demas was with Paul in Rome. That sounds exciting. Rome. Paul. In one reference, Paul couples the name of Demas with that of Luke and John Mark and gratefully refers to the three of them as "my fellow workers". That's nice. In the next reference, Paul says, "Luke, the beloved physician and Demas greet you. (Colossians 4: 14). And then the final reference to Demas has some sad overtones for near the end of his letter to young Timothy, Paul pens this line that I touched on a moment ago,

"For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you...for he is very useful in serving me".

(II Timothy 4: 9-11)

Now...first let's give Betty Ann a nod for having handled all those New Testament names so nicely..."trippingly on the tongue"...you can tell she grew up in a Sunday School!

So far as we know, there is no more information available to us regarding Demas than these three reference. All we know is that this man was one of Paul's "lieutenants" in Rome who for a time shared the Apostle's work there, but at length deserted the cause and went back to Thessalonica. I wonder what happened?

IMAGINATION GOES TO WORK

From there on...the imagination goes to work and fills in the outline. Since Demas went back to Thessalonica can we not assume that's where his "roots" were? Had he been there among the converts in that Macedonian City when Paul first came through there preaching the Gospel of a Risen Christ? Had we come forward "in the altar call" following Paul's stirring message? Had he been one of the founders of the little church there....perhaps even opening up his home for small meetings of those who had been won to Christ and wanted to hear more? Did he share his time and talent to its growing strength?

And on one occasion, when Paul came back through Thessalonica to conduct a bit of church business did Demas take Paul over to one side after the Benediction and say,

"Look, Paul.....I've been giving this some thought....and if you can use me, I'd like to sign up and be a part of your team...that travels....I can do this...I can do that."

Anyway, somewhere along the line Paul met Demas, sized him up as a man who could be of help and welcomed him to his team. And can't you imagine how proud the members of "Old First Church, Thessalonica" must have been when their fellow member marched off in company with Paul, the great leader....and there were speeches and flowers and perhaps even a small purse at the coffee hour following the time of worship and study. What an honor!

And, for a time, one supposes, all went well and Demas thrilled to his new life - new sights and new adventures...never a dull moment. Imagine seeing Rome, the center of the world of his day. Then, too, there was a certain fascination about this man, Paul...why, he always seemed to emerge triumphant over his troubles and trials. There was a certain amount of prestige, too, about presenting your credentials as a member of Paul's team. Imagine how Demas must have felt as Paul placed a hand on his shoulder and said..."Nice going, Demas!"

But the day came when some of the newness wore off and now Paul was getting in more hot water....in prison and the power of Nero loomed large. As someone has put it, "you never know the strength of a tea bag until it's in hot water." It was more and more dangerous to be a follower of Christ. At times, the faith seemed so vague. The old town and those old ties tugged....tugged at the heart of Demas. One wonders...did Demas perhaps sit down one afternoon in Rome as he was enjoying a cup of capacino across from the Colosseum and pen Paul a note.

"Paul...I really hate to do this to you. You've been a good friend and buddy....but I just don't think there is where I belong. It just isn't for me. By the time you read this, I'll be on my way back to Thessalonica. Thanks for everything. And good luck to you in your work."

Of course we don't know the details. All we have is Paul's final and sad reference to Demas, "And Demas...in love with this present world, has deserted me". But even from such meager information, we are reminded once more than the Bible is not an unrealistic version of our human nature...not the result of collusion which omits that which is unfavorable, but rather the result of some honest reporting which pictures people as they were - and, we might add, as they are!

DEMAS IS NO STRANGER TO US

Our encounter with Demas here this morning first causes us to look outward and to admit that Demas is no stranger to our list of acquaintances. One of the darkest and most difficult moments in life occurs, I believe, when we realize that someone in whom we have placed trust and confidence has let us down...failed us, fooled us, frustrated us.

It should be of some "little comfort" to us in such low moments to remember that any adventure in faith in people will almost inevitably result in disappointment.

So Paul had his Demas and Jesus, of course, had his Judas. Here was the peerless "pioneer" of our faith and here was His tall First Lieutenant...both of them surrounding themselves with men who grew into the strongest kind of discipleship, but each of them choosing at least one person who is remembered today as a deserter, a defector, a disappointment.

So, remember that, you who are in business....the next time you are pondering the puzzling failure of some one you had chosen for a position of responsibility, a position of trust. And remember that, those of us in the Church, the next time we are disappointed in a person in whom we had confidence as a leader or holder of responsibility, or a position of trust. Remember this, too....in our friendships and relationships....when a recipient of love does not measure up in his or her response....and drifts off and away. Indeed, Jesus and Paul knew something about such risks of disappointment and desertion "in the ranks" of followers.

Now, in all of this, we need not reject or revise anything previously preached or said about the power of persistent love. Love still abides as the greatest and strongest force in the world, but it does need to be added that even the love of God is not coercive. God has given to each of us the dignity of freedom of choice and God Himself respects that dignity.

This is the fact which is unforgettably etched in Holman Hunt's masterpiece and great painting, "The Light of the World"....a copy of which hangs there in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. I always make a point of going to see it whenever I have the joy of being in London. Make a point some day of standing there in front of it, if you haven't. Jesus stands knocking at the door, but there is no latch on the outside of that door. The door can only be opened from the inside. So Jesus could not coerce Judas....even by the power of so great love, and neither could Paul coerce Demas.

And anyone who follows the Master's injunction to "love one another" may well meet up with Demas somewhere along the line, along life's path, even as did Paul. For we read...sadly....

"Demas, in love with this present world has deserted me".

FAILED TO FINISH

But now....the more difficult lesson from our brief encounter with Demas here today is to look inward and to ask ourselves whether we're a distant relative of this First Century man who lacked the ability to finish what he started. I suspect that all of us know something of the enthusiasm of splendid beginnings and then the doldrums of an uninspired continuance when we are sorely tempted to let down, give up, move on, and move out. It happens....sometimes it happens even in the church.

Years ago I came across a delightful line in the Reader's Digest offered by a mom whose son earned his spending money by mowing lawns. As one who mowed many a lawn as a teenager, I clipped it. She said that one Saturday morning her son was unusually slow in leaving the house and when she asked him about this delay, he simply said....

"Oh, mom....I'm just waiting 'till people get started, for you see, mom....I get most of my jobs from people who give up half way through...."

And that contribution is certainly in keeping with the spirit of the oft-quoted comment of the Duke of Wellington when someone asked him the secret of the English victory over the French forces at Waterloo. Said, he,

"We were brave.....five minutes longer....."

And who was it who said,

"The rock bottom thing about life is to keep on going when we don't want to keep on going, and to be willing to give up what isn't really that necessary".

Most of us know how easy it is to stop halfway through and how difficult it is to find that added perseverance that provides the margin of victory. Yes, as someone has pointed out,

"It's easier to build a reputation than it is to maintain it...." (Give me an 'AMEN' on that....if you agree).

YOU...in school. Are you Demas? Demas abounds in good intentions...does well on his achievement tests....becomes labeled as a "promising youth"...but you know how it is....the homework becomes sandwiched in between telephone and television, the outside activities pile up, the exams come along, the friends tug at you, the marking period begins and soon the records are recorded....the years pass and people shake their heads and say,

"I wonder whatever happened to Demas? Remember him in Junior High....he...she...had such promise in High School? I wonder what happened?"

YOU...who are busy....whether in vocation or some volunteer work. Are you a distant relative of Demas? You start a job to the tune of congratulations and good wishes. You take on a responsibility in your community, or bringing it home closer...in your church. After a few weeks or months at it, you run into hardships and headaches, criticisms, frustrations and problems and soon you're ready to "chuck it". Pass it on. Let someone else do it. Do not misunderstand me....I'm not pleading for that "blind endurance" which glues a person to a commitment or a position for ever and ever....but by and large, as a nation of workers, we're more inclined to be tentative than tenacious. Let me repeat that. And when things get dull or rough and the nice weather beckons, we pack up...pull out...rather than pushing on.

There's a bit of Demas in all of us. So...be careful. And watch out for those subtle temptations of this city, and not so subtle at times. They can do a job on you and pull you away from those values you had when you first came here and had in such great abundance. There really isn't a great deal we can do for Demas...he's gone, dead, but there is something we can do for ourselves, something we can do to strengthen our lives, our loyalties and resist temptation. I remember a poem from other days that has been running through my mind as I pulled my notes together for today's message on Demas and his life story.

Here it is...

"Across the fields of yesterday, he sometimes comes to me,
A little lad just back from play - the lad I use to be.

And yet he smiles so wistfully, once he has crept within,
I wonder if he hopes to see the man I might have been".

I wonder.....I wonder how Demas might have felt had he repeated that poem to himself a few years after deserting the cause and leaving Paul. But I'm even more concerned about the effect it has on us today as we think of the tasks that touch our lives in the work of the Kingdom.

DESERTERS, DEFECTORS AND DEMAS

"And Demas...in love with the present world has deserted me" wrote Paul. This city takes its toll on all of our values, so be careful.

I'm sure of this.....that a religious faith of meaningful depth, a faith commitment undergirded by prayer and weekly worship and time given to serving others.....such can save one from falling away. For all of the imperfections of both pulpit and pew, God still uses worship to renew and to teach His children. Isaiah claimed this years and centuries ago when he wrote that beautiful line,

"They that WAIT upon the Lord shall renew their strength!....you know the rest of it...."mount up with wings, as eagles. RUN and not be WEARY. WALK and not faint."

And this claim was validated by Jesus, Himself, in His own experience of prayer and of worship....so obviously renewing and restoring His energy and His perspective on things that the disciples came to Him and said,

"LORD....TEACH US how to pray....."

It says in the Bible, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me". Built on that and take that line out of here with you...to be put in that place in your life where you keep the things that are most important...to be taken out and looked at from time to time. "We can do all things in Him who strengthens us". With that as our anchor, we shall not end up drifting away like Demas, forsaking the Kingdom Enterprise that calls us and demands of us our very best. May it never be said of you....whatever your name....

"For.....in love with this present world,
has deserted me...and gone to...."

PRAYER

Make us sensitive, O God, to your presence...peace and power...at the end of this service of prayer and praise, of joy and of celebration.....brood over this congregation. Walk through this community of faith...touching, lifting and renewing each of us to higher levels of service, commitment and giving. Unite us and bless us collectively in our efforts in the tasks of kingdom building. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.