

# “Holding Onto What Matters Most”

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**Sermon Preached: Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

**Preacher: Pastor Jason Sander**

**Location: St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton**

**Sermon Text: [2 Thessalonians 2:13-17](#)**

So, just thinking about what I was reflecting on with the kids, are there any important traditions that you have in your family, things that are important to you? Let's think about that and I'll pray for us as we continue in the Word. Loving Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for your Word and that it is alive and that it is living within us, around us and through us. So, we pray, come Holy Spirit and open our hearts to hear you speaking to us today, Lord Jesus.

Shape us through these words to be more like you. Come Holy Spirit and be upon my words too and may what I've prepared and what I speak here be pleasing to you and for the benefit of your people gathered here this morning. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

So, do you have any treasured family traditions, things that you've always done, you don't really know why but it's what you do? Usually around celebrations like Christmas and Easter, I share that with the kids. Kay must have been reading my mind when I talked about, you have to have prawns on Christmas Day, don't you? Lunch. When do you open the presents? Christmas Eve or Christmas Day? Any special traditions that you find happen in your home that's been passed down from perhaps your grandparents or your parents? Anything stand out to you at this time? Honey biscuit making.

Yeah. I remember doing that. I remember my mum always getting out a list and Christmas cards, she'd buy boxes of them and then she'd write into them and then stamp, put the stamp on them and send them off.

That doesn't really happen anymore, does it? But that was a big tradition. It still happens for you, does it, Adrian? Yep. What else can you think of? Plum pudding.

Plum pudding. Yep. One of the, I was at New Residents Church and one of their things was we played cricket on Christmas Day after lunch.

The family always plays cricket. Water fight. Water fight, yep.

Especially these hot summers. Drinking stout on Christmas Eve. Drinking stout on Christmas Eve, yeah.

Yeah. It's interesting how we do think certain ways and some of us even have these unwritten rules about how we cut the roast or who cuts the roast or the turkey or who sits at the table, who starts the prayer. And these little traditions, whatever they mean, they actually do matter to us.

They remind us of who we are and where we've come from. That's why we hold on to them dearly like opening presents at a certain time. They connect us to people that we love.

And because of that, they carry that emotional warmth. They give meaning. They bring back memories and they create belonging for us.

But if someone dares to change them, well, that's another story, isn't it? Suddenly the roast just doesn't quite taste the same. Christmas feels a bit off. We can get surprisingly defensive, can't we? That's because traditions, they touch our heart.

They're not just habits. They're part of our story. That's not only true in families.

It's also true in the church as well, isn't it? We all know what it's like to see things change and we have seen things change quite a bit in church life in the last 50 years. You only have to look around our district and the farms to see how communities, how culture changes. Think how people used to farm a generation or two ago.

That old tractor up the top is an Upton. I didn't know about that, but Peter Heineken at New Rez, he said he couldn't read it, but he said, that looks like an Upton. Surely enough, it was locally built from old army tanks after the war or something.

Things you learn. The thing is, though, it's changed, hasn't it? How we farm. Maybe you remember when there used to be a horse pulling the plough behind, pulling the plough.

Or that old tractor where there was more smoke than horsepower. Or where you milked by hand, mended the fences yourself and the kids helped around the farm and brought the hay in before the rain came, whatever that may be. But things have changed.

Now we've got these GPS-guided machinery, automatic gates and apps that tell you where to spray, where to sow. Some of it's wonderful, it saves time and effort, but for many of us, there can be a sadness to it too. To remember the old ways.

They weren't just methods, they were part of life, part of who we were, the good old days. That's the tricky thing about change, whether it's in farming or family life or church. It's not just about the surface stuff, it's about those things that have meaning to us.

So when something changes in church, perhaps a new song or a different way of doing things, things get moved, it can cause us to feel a little bit unsettled at times. Sometimes we might even think, they're doing it wrong! But that's worth us pausing for a moment and just thinking, why does that perhaps bother us? Could it be that our hearts have become more attached to the way we do things than to the one we gather to worship? It doesn't harm us to stop and ask, well, why do we do what we do here on Sundays? Why do we do what we do as a church during the week? Why do we stand for some parts and sit for others? Why do we use certain words? Why do we sing these songs? Why do we follow a particular pattern? The thing is, behind every part of our worship, there's a story. Some of those stories stretch right back to the early church.

The first Christians gathering in their homes to pray, to sing, to publicly read scripture. The Old Testament, the Psalms. Reading out Paul's letters when they came on.

Sharing communion together. Other traditions have developed later, shaped by culture, language and history, and to retell the salvation story as generations died out and new ones came along. Now, there's nothing wrong with those later traditions.

They can be beautiful ways to express our faith. But we should always test them by one simple question. Does this point us to Christ? Oh, hey, I had another picture up here.

What about that one? Just off the side, I've been looking at photos of the church. This is St. Petri out the back in 1904, when the church had the dedication. And so I put it through one of those colour machine thingies, or whatever programs, and that's what it looked like.

That's 1904, and then not even 20 years, 18 years later, St. Peter's with all the cars out the front. That's how things change. It's still the same Jesus, isn't it? And so that question is, does this point us to Christ? Does this song, does this prayer, does this way of doing things help us hear the gospel? The good news is that Jesus loves us, forgives us, and he gives us hope.

And if it does, that's what's worth holding on to. But if it doesn't, it's become something we simply do, because that's the way it's always been done. And maybe that's the time when we need to just loosen our grip a bit.

And that's exactly what Paul is saying to the Thessalonians. He writes, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings that you were taught. Or, hold fast to the traditions, we could say.

What's been passed on to you. What are the type of traditions he's talking about? Well, after he says this to them, he gives them an encouragement. They didn't have these centuries of customs built up.

They didn't have hymnals, pews. They didn't even have the New Testament or the Gospels, Bible, like we do. They had different traditions.

But Paul says, hold on to what's important. That Jesus Christ is Lord, that God is our Father, that we are loved by Jesus, and that we're saved by grace through faith, through his undeserved forgiveness. The fruit of that is eternal life.

These are the traditions, Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, hold tight to these. Not the external forms, but the living truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. And that's what keeps the church alive.

That's what gives us hope, joy and purpose. And so Paul goes on to say that this grace brings internal encouragement and good hope. Eternal encouragement and good hope.

Beautiful phrase that is. Grace means that we're loved and forgiven, not because we've got the right traditions or the perfect worship style, but because of what Jesus has done for us. Grace means every time we come through these doors into worship, no matter of our weak, our doubts, our history, we are met by a saviour who welcomes us as his own.

And that's the heart of the real tradition that Paul wants us to hold on to. That living, breathing gospel that brings dead hearts to life. That's where these traditions, these teachings in the church are good, when they carry that gospel.

When the form, the things we do help us deliver that content. When the way we do things helps us see Jesus more clearly. When our traditions become more important than the truth that it's meant to point to, that's when we lose something vital.

I once read a story, it was in some book I was reading, and it was about a small country church. Not too different from ours in the sense that they had an altar up the front. This isn't from the story, this is just a random picture to help you think about this story.

And on the altar were these brass candlesticks. For as long as anyone in this community could remember, it had always been placed slightly to the left of centre. Now one day a new member was helping to clean the church and they polished the candlesticks and moved it to the middle so it would look symmetrical.

Nothing wrong with that? I see Kristen nodding her head, I agree is it? Yeah, it's pretty good. I was at a church, I reckon they used to get a ruler out to make sure that the candle was exactly the right. It didn't do any harm, it was just their thing.

So anyway, this person moved it so it looked symmetrical. Now the next Sunday there was a bit of murmuring and muttering in the congregation. Why is the candlestick in the middle? It's not meant to be there.

Now eventually someone went digging through the old church records and discovered that many decades earlier the window behind the altar used to leak. And so the pastor had moved the candlestick to the left to keep it from getting wet. And it had stayed there ever since.

That's often how traditions form. Often from something small and practical. But that can take on enormous weight over time.

And the question always is, does this help us proclaim Christ? Now symmetrical candles might make me feel a little bit less anxious as it would for some of you too. But at the end of the day, does this help us proclaim Christ? If it does, wonderful. If not, perhaps it is time for us to adjust.

Just as farmers have learnt to adjust how they sow and harvest without ever losing sight of the goal. Bringing life from the soil. So we hold fast to what truly matters.

That's the unchanging truths of our faith. That Jesus Christ is Lord. That God loves us and forgives us through his grace.

That eternal life is already ours in him. Now farming changes, technology changes, culture changes, church life changes. But Jesus Christ, the heart of our faith, never changes.

He's the same yesterday, today and forever. And so as Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed. And may the peace of our God, may it encapture your hearts and guard you in him.

Amen. Amen. Let me pray.

Father God, we give you thanks that you remind us of the most important thing. Your son, Jesus Christ. Lord, help us each and every day to be focused on him.

And as a church community, that we build traditions, we build customs and things as a family here that are always pointing to him and bringing glory to you. Lord, continue to grow us as a community here. And to create and form new traditions that speak your gospel to all ages and all people here in this community.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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