

Advent 3

“Your continuous sanctified life through our faithful Lord Jesus Christ)

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

December 17, 2023

Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Third Sunday of Advent is from our epistle reading 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

“23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.”

So far the text...

Weren't we just hearing readings from 1 Thessalonians recently? Ah, yes...Right before Thanksgiving, we were finishing up the last Sundays of the church year hearing the epistle readings from chapters 1, 4 and 5 of 1 Thessalonians. Remember what we heard earlier in chapter 5?

“4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day.”

And as we wait, what did Paul tell the Thessalonians and us also?

“8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”

That's where we are at right now, living together with Jesus, with our certain hope of salvation, with His gifts of spiritual armament so that we are defended from all evil...and comforting each other with these words.

But before we hear the closing words of Paul's epistle, what did we do these past two Sundays of Advent?

Well, we began the Advent season jumping over to readings from 1 Corinthians and 2nd Peter. The focus has been being ready for Jesus' 2nd coming as we heard last week in 2nd Peter 3:9:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

When Jesus is coming, we don't know. But God especially has good plan for you! He's focused on your whole spirit – that is your whole being – which is your body and soul. He, Himself, and no other – the God of peace will sanctify you completely!

He's working on you right now, and it's taking some time, isn't it? Your spiritual growth...that is. It's a good thing that God hasn't come right away, because He's getting you into strong spiritual shape so that you can be a shining light of His workmanship to others.

God doesn't want any to perish, but that all should come to repentance, of course including you and me. So that you are preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your Lord, my Lord, our Lord.

Together, in the communion of the saints, it is each of our prayers, that our Lord who has called us into the faith, forgiven us completely, will sanctify us completely, making us more and more into the sons and daughters that He has made us through faith in Jesus.

Which brings us to the theme of today – the 3rd Sunday of Advent – Gaudate. That's the Latin name for this Sunday which means “rejoice”. And so we see why our reading from 1 Thessalonians 5 was saved for today. For it begins as we heard, **“Rejoice always.”**

Does that describe you? Are you always rejoicing? Never a grumpy moment? Never downtrodden, sullen, despaired, frustrated? That word, “always” is an eye catcher, isn't it? It gives us pause to think about why we should be always rejoicing.

Paul repeated these words to the Philippians in chapter 4 which gives us the “why”.

“4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!”

In the Lord is where we find our rejoicing. United with Him in our baptism, who was baptized to take upon Himself the sins of the world. Paul tells the Philippians and also each of us why the Christians life is one of continual rejoicing right before he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always”.

“And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”

Through the Gospel message of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus, we are assured that our names are written in the Book of Life. Is that not cause for rejoicing? Even when the hot water tank leaks and gets the floor and the walls wet? Of course, because we have been washed in our baptism and called heirs of the Kingdom of God!

Paul doesn't stop there though, does he? **“17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks”**.

As a flower turns toward the sun to receive it's light and life, so we turn always to the Son of God in prayer. It's our continual posture in words spoken out loud and in our heart of praise, petition and thanksgiving to the One who has made us His children and continually hears our prayer as a dear Father.

In fact, we'll hear on December 31st, the first week after Christmas, these words from the epistle of Galatians 4:

Galatians 4:6

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”

Because you are who you are, a son or daughter of the Most High God, you have the Holy Spirit leading you to pray to your dear Father. God tells us to pray and give thanks in all circumstances... when we're sick, when we're tested, when we're persecuted, when we're enjoying the good things of the Lord...

Paul summarizes all these commands from the Lord to rejoice, pray, give thanks always, without ceasing, in all circumstances with a simple explanation of why.

“for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” God’s will is always good and will work for your good in all circumstances.

And so, to keep you focused on His good and gracious will, Paul tells us how to stay strong.

“19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies.”

The Holy Spirit comes to us through the Word and Sacraments to comfort and strengthen His people and remind us of His great work of salvation in Jesus. We are told not to resist, or reject God’s Word for in it is life. “But gladly hear and learn it” says Martin Luther.

This Word of God will give you clarity of what is good and evil so that you can abstain from all evil. It will give you clarity to test the teachings that you hear to know what is false and what is true.

And as you hear the Word of God and receive His Sacrament of the altar, the God of peace, He Himself, will strengthen you with His peace, as you continually receive the blessing of His forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper. Want to rejoice more? Pray more? Give thanks in all circumstances? God gives us the means to receive the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus often. For through this means of grace God gives you the very joy, peace and thankfulness in your soul.

So Paul concludes 1 Thessalonians with these words.

“27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

That’s who you are – holy, preserved blameless, by the grace of God, until His final coming. And the Lord who calls you is faithful to do it. Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)