Listening for the Promise

Third Sunday in Advent – December 13, 2020

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecy, but test everything; hold fast what is good.

Abstain from every form of evil.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22

I first paid close attention to these words of St. Paul when I was about 20 years old and was reading the holocaust account of Dutch author, Corrie Ten Boom, called, “The Hiding Place.” She and her family were watchmakers in Holland during WWII. Passionate, caring Christians that they were, they saw what atrocities were being enacted on the Jewish people and they took great risk to hide many Jews above their watch shop, and moved them to safety in other countries.

Eventually the Nazis figured out what the Ten Boom family was up to and arrested Corrie, her sister Betsy, and their father. They were sent to a concentration camp. Throughout, these verses of Scripture would come up in their study together. Corrie would ask her sister, “Give thanks in ALL circumstances?” And Betsy would answer, “Yes, Corrie, in ALL circumstances.” Corrie didn’t like that answer much, but eventually she would come to see God acting in ways that she never could have imagined.

One of those ways was how Corrie was able to smuggle a small Bible into the camp. It hung around her neck on a string. She was scared they would find it and she would be further punished for carrying such contraband. The guards frisked the woman in front of her, then the woman behind her in the line of prisoners, but somehow, miraculously, no one touched her. The Bible made it safely into the camp.

It was this Bible the sisters used to teach other prisoners, both Jews and Gentiles, about Christ. Each day they would huddle around the small volume and read with the sisters commenting on each text. Many came to Christ through these study sessions. The barracks where they taught were infested with fleas, which made life even more uncomfortable. Corrie questioned these conditions repeatedly, but Betsy always reminded her, “Give thanks in ALL circumstances.” Those fleas prevented the guards from entering the barracks. If they had, there would have been no Bible and no studies. God used fleas so that his holy Word could be heard!