

First Sunday in Advent  
“Strengthened by God for Jesus’ Final Coming” (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)  
December 1, 2024  
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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 the First Sunday in Advent is from our Epistle reading, 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

**“11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”**

So far the text...

Thessalonica...Paul wrote his first letter to the newly formed Thessalonian congregation from Corinth in about the year 50 AD after he had sent Timothy to them to hear of their faith and strengthen them. The congregation was formed on Paul’s second missionary journey. Thessalonika was first named after Thessalonike, the half-sister of Alexander the Great after Cassander of Macedon conquered it in 315 BC.

Literally her name means “Thessalonian victory”. They planted the Greek flag of victory in this very important port city. We all are familiar with the shoe brand, Nike. It comes from the Greek word for victory. Nike was also the Greek goddess that the athletes worshipped.

Into this city of moral laxity and a confluence of religious idols and false gods, Paul brings the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, death and the devil. He plants the Christian Cross among those who believe as Acts 17 tells us.

**“2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.”**

But there was opposition to the Gospel from some of the Jews. **“these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.”**

Wherever the cross of Christ is planted, there will be opposition. Maybe you watched some of the college football rivalry games yesterday. In one game, no names mentioned, the winning team planted their flag at midfield which immediately got a reaction from the home team. Tempers flew and the police had to get the pepper spray out to break it up.

On a much more significant level, Paul was fighting for the souls of unbelievers but the opposition grabbed him. He had just got out of the jail in Phillipi so this was nothing new to him. So, what happened? **“10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.”**

Paul, of course, prayed for the Thessalonians and very much wanted to know how they were doing after he had been forced to leave. Would the congregation falter under persecution? So Paul sent Timothy back to them to hear of their faith and to strengthen it.

When Timothy returned to Paul in Corinth, the news was good from Timothy. Despite the worldly influences and persecution from the Jews, the congregation was strong. Listen to Paul’s opening greeting in chapter 1:

**“5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.**

Though there was affliction, there was also joy and not only that this congregation became shining examples to greater Macedonia! The missionary work of Paul started in the port city of Thessalonica and then went inland.

**8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**

Paul continues:

**9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

The Good News of the Gospel gave roots to the church and fruits began to be seen. Of course, that is the order – roots first then fruits, not the other way around. Good works are not the cause of our justification but the proof of it. Jesus had delivered them from the wrath to come at His second coming and they were strengthened to wait with faith for His return.

God planted this church, Immanuel, over 100 years ago by His precious Gospel. And the victory of the Lamb of God remains our strength in the face of opposition. And, the good news goes inland through the sons and daughters and grandchildren who have settled in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas and other cities. And, our brothers and sisters from the north who spend their winters here also go forth with the Good News to their homes. Yes, we wait for Jesus coming also with active faith as the Gospel sounds forth from here.

We shod our feet with the Gospel victory of peace in Jesus – Victory through His death and resurrection – Nike for all people! And it sounds forth...whether it be at the invocation of the Christmas Tree lighting ceremony with our school kids singing praises to God, or at a Reformation Trunk or Treat, where the sweet Gospel was shared in tracts and Bibles and speech, or a visit to the Veterans home and the Garden at Brooks Ridge where Christmas carols were sung, or a youth night or our personal witness of Christ. God calls each of us to give witness to His victory in Jesus.

Our God and Father Himself does this our text says. He increases your love for one another. He strengthens you with His Word and Sacraments as we wait for Jesus coming. He does this **“so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”**

Blamelessness in holiness – that’s what God gives to you through your faith in Jesus. As we heard in our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 33: **“a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely.**

And the bride of Jesus, His Holy church, the communion of saints, the believers of Thessalonica, of Immanuel and beyond, what is the bride called? **And this is the name by which she will be called: “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”**

Jesus’ righteousness is our righteousness through faith so that we will stand blameless on the last day!

Paul was very encouraged to hear that the Thessalonians had not fallen away and given up their blameless hearts... **“lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.”** God encourages us as He did the Thessalonians to begin this new Christian Year on this First Sunday of Advent planting the victory flag of the Gospel firmly in our hearts. Paul tells us in the next chapter of Thessalonians, chapter 4, these truths to keep us ever strong and waiting with joy.

**“13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”**

Christians mourn the death of loved ones in 2024 and in the new year of 2025. But we sorrow with hope. That because Jesus died and rose again, because of His victory, God will awake those who sleep in the grave.

**“15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”**

What are we thankful for? That was a question we asked the youth on Monday. And they answered “God”. Yes, we are thankful to God through Jesus Christ as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

**“55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”  
56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

How do we wait for Jesus coming?

**58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

**Amen.**

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