

Advent 2  
December 5, 2021

“Thanking God for your fellowship in the Gospel of Jesus”  
(Philippians 1:3-8)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Today’s text for this Second Sunday of Advent is from our Epistle reading,  
Philippians 1:3-8

**“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”**

Here ends our text.

Paul begins his letter to the Philippians by thanking God for them. It’s common that we thank God for food, health, good weather, jobs, income, and other things. This is of course good to acknowledge God as the giver of all things. How often in our prayers do we thank God for people?

We pray for people, for doctors, nurses, servicemen and women, spouses, our children and families, leaders, kings, teachers, missionaries, pastors, parents and other people. But, how about thanking God for them?

This is what Paul does right away. He thanks God every time he remembers the Philippian believers. He writes this letter to the saints there including the pastors and deacons. Paul writes this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome. It would have been easy for Paul to have a negative outlook on sinful humanity, instead of thanking God for people who are both sinners and saints.

He was unjustly in prison by the hand of sinners. Sinful men and women do evil to each other. They are envious and jealous as we heard last week about the Judaizers who put Paul's life in danger in Thessalonica so that he had to flee to Berea.

Sinful men and women don't speak the truth to each other. They betray each other, gossip about each other. They curse each other, covet and steal from each other among other sins. Inanimate things don't do that. It's easier to thank God for things, rather than thanking God for believers who too often mess up.

How difficult is it to thank God for those closest to you when you see their sins up close and personal that the rest of the world may not see? Of course, the Philippians were not perfect people. No one is.

As the students were setting up the Christmas trees on the stage in the social hall and decorating them, the teachers remarked that some of them weren't pointing straight up. Is there such thing as a perfect Christmas tree? You try to find the fullest best shaped Christmas tree, but there are none that are perfect, are there? There's always that bare spot that you turn and put in the back that it isn't so noticeable. Yes, we thank God for Christmas trees!

But, how about the sinner/saint people who are putting up the trees? How about the family members who are so busy with Christmas preparations and all the extra work it takes to get ready? Bake cookies? Put up Christmas lights? Decorate the tree? Shop and wrap presents? Fix special meals? Do we take the time to thank God for them in every remembrance of them?

Do the extra stresses of this time of year increase conflict within the family? Paul's answer?

**“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”.**

The Philippians were sinful people like all of us, but Paul remembers them the way God remembers them – in their fellowship of the Gospel. From the moment that God called them and rescued them from condemnation, from that first day, everything changed! They were now saints because of the precious Gospel.

That's how Paul addresses them as he opens his letter, isn't it?

**“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Saints! Yes, we confess that we believe in the communion of saints. For it is God who changes us poor sinners into His forgiven righteous saints.

You know the story of how the Philippian church was begun. Acts 16 tells us. began with a call from God in a vision that Paul received. Come to Macedonia pleaded a man. God had plans to save some people there and make them His saints.

The people were not well off enough to have a synagogue. So, what does Paul do? He goes to where the people are...to the riverside where it was their custom to pray. There they met Lydia, a seller of purple and God opened her heart to hear Paul and she was baptized with her whole family. She implored them to stay with them at her home. Her sins and those of her family were washed away in their baptisms and they became saints in the eyes of God and also Paul.

So, God wants us to see each of us baptized Christians as saints and fellow heirs of God’s kingdom. And thank God for each other. God has done it all. He began this good work of faith and will continue it to the end. This is why Paul can with all confidence thank God for fellow believers!

**“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.”**

This is the right way to think of each other Paul says, in the positive light of the Gospel, as forgiven children of God!

You are all partakers with me of grace. Paul certainly didn’t deserve to be called a saint. He persecuted Christ’s people. But, it was by grace that he was saved as with all of us. Listen how Paul goes on to describe these fellow partakers of the Gospel of grace in chapter 4.

**“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.”** My joy, my crown, my beloved! When we think of

each other like Paul does, how can we not help but thank God at every remembrance for each other?

Yes, we still have our sinful flesh and Paul even addresses this in the next verse with two women who seemed to be having differences or conflicts.

**I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, (Paul speaks to one of the leaders) 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.” (Philippians 4:1-3)**

Yes, Paul can thank God always for the Philippian brethren, while at the same time urging them to be of the same mind, putting away any differences. Why? For their names are written in the Book of Life by the power of the Gospel! The women especially worked hard with Paul in the law? No! In the Gospel! The saving message of Christ’s work on the cross. All who believe this message have their names written in the Book of Life!

So, Paul cannot help but exclaim in the very next verse.

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

The Gospel changes the way we look at each other and the way of our thinking in general. We are urged to see the good that God does in all things and think on these things!

**“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”**

So, Paul concludes in chapter 4 with a special thanks to the Philippians who also gave him monetary aid. He thanks them for sending him financial help while he was with the Thessalonians and while he was in prison.

**“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.”**

Paul, of course, had learned by the grace of God to be content in every situation.

**11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”**

But, he is most thankful and rejoices for the gifts that they sent him. He especially rejoices that in this way that they are bearing fruit in the Lord.

**“For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever.”**

The gifts from the Philippians were sweet smelling aromas – well pleasing to God! Yes, all glory be to God always! For it is God who supplies all our needs both physical and spiritual in Jesus Christ.

All that we are and all that we do are gifts from God. He has made us saints and given each of us opportunities to serve Him. He has made us thankful saints for each other that we have fellowship in this Gospel, partakers of His grace. We partake together today especially of the body and blood of Jesus for our forgiveness of sins.

Yes, it is God who began this good work in you and He will bring it to completion on the last day, when He comes in glory. In this we are confident! Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

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