

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 28, 2021
1st Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36

Hymns: 356:1,2,5,7; 64; 56; 53:1,2,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, ¹³so 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.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Advent: A season of Preparation.

The central idea of Advent is Christ's coming. We understand this gracious truth in three ways. As we prepare to celebrate our Savior's birth in just a few short weeks it is natural for us to focus on the Son of God coming into the flesh as Jesus the Christ. We experience great joy at our Savior's birth because of the gospel

message that is attached to it. Jesus' birth is good news for all people, for we are all sinners who need salvation.

That takes us to the other themes of Advent, that Jesus comes into our hearts, and that Jesus will come again to receive us to the glory of everlasting life.

On this first Sunday in Advent as we celebrate the grace of Jesus' coming may the Holy Spirit direct --

THEME: Our Prayer for Advent Preparation.

Paul's words in this 1st epistle to the Thessalonians remind us to pray, --

I. Lord Deepen our Faith.

Paul speaks of prayers of thanksgiving that he and the others on his missionary team lifted to heaven on behalf of the Christians in Thessalonica. *"For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?"* (1 Thessalonians 3:9-10) Paul's words remind us of the gift of faith, and how thankful we should be that the Lord has brought such joy to our hearts through our knowledge of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy rejoiced with great joy because of the faith of their fellow Christians.

However, their prayers didn't stop with the fact that these other people were called to faith because of the testimony they had presented to them over the course of a month. Paul's desire was for the Thessalonian Christians to grow in faith. It was Paul's prayer that they might have the opportunity to visit them and give them further instruction. It wasn't a matter that the Thessalonians had something wrong with their faith, that they believed some false doctrine, but that there was so much more for them to learn about their Lord and the salvation which Jesus had secured for them.

That is the key for us in our Advent prayer. The Advent season is a time when we express our joy of faith with our fellow believers. It is a time to rejoice that the Lord has called us to faith, so that

Christmas means so much more to us than the superficial joys the world knows. So, it is also a time for us to grow in our faith and in our knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We come to worship to thank and praise the Lord for the grace He has bestowed upon us, but we also come to worship to learn more about Jesus and grow in our faith and trust in Jesus. that doesn't mean that our faith is defective. It is saving faith. But our salvation is a wonder of God's grace that has come to us in Jesus, and it is a wonder about which we can learn so much more. As we learn we will grow not only in knowledge and assurance of salvation, but also in our joy that we share with our fellow believers. It is our prayer that the Lord would bless the ministry of the gospel here at St. Paul's so that in our worship and in our Sunday school classes and our Bible classes and our catechism classes and instruction classes and in our counseling, and in our home visits faith and knowledge of salvation will increase, and Jesus will be glorified, and joy will be shared.

Sometimes we might be tempted to think I know enough about Jesus. What does that mean? Where does a thought like that come from? How can we ever know enough, much less too much about the One who came into the world to save us? He saved us at such a high personal cost to secure for us such spectacular blessings. May our advent prayer be, "**Lord, Deepen our Faith.**"

Then let us add to that,

II. Lord, Increase our Love!

Of course, it all starts with Christ's love with which He loved us. This love has been instilled in our hearts. We are familiar with the Bible verse: "*We love Him because He first loved us*". (1 John 4:19) It is true that our love for our God and Savior is based and built upon the love God has for us, that love which drove Jesus to the cross to redeem us. That love has been instilled in our hearts by faith. And so, we love Jesus because He first loved us. Certainly, our advent prayer that our love be increased begins with our love for our Savior God. As we review the truth about our salvation beginning with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and all through His life,

death, resurrection, and ascension, and His watched for return in glory, our love for Jesus will grow and increase.

Our love for Jesus doesn't end with Jesus. Paul also addresses in our text how Christians love one another. *“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.”* (1 Thessalonians 3:11-12)

Paul's desire to be able to return to Thessalonica and spend time with the Christians there is an expression of his love for his fellow Christians. That is such an elementary expression of love that we can appreciate, and it is an expression of Christian love that we pray be increased among us. We come together around the Word because we love Him who loved us, AND we come **together** around His Word because we then also love our fellow Christian, especially the members of our congregation, our Christian family. You know the Greek for that beloved Bible verse I quoted a minute ago is actually, *“We love, because He first loved us.”* (1 John 4:19) We love one another because we share that joy of salvation, because we comprehend the wonder of grace that brings us together into one family with God as our Father, and the Lord Jesus as our brother. This entire relationship is built upon the love of God for a lost mankind. **Lord, increase our love!**

But let us also pray, **“Lord, extend our love to others!”** Even as Paul loved his fellow Christians who were far away, so we love our fellow Christians, and pray for our fellow Christians, and fulfill acts of love and kindness toward them. But what about others? In our text Paul didn't limit his prayer to the love for our Christian brothers and sisters, but added three little words with a huge impact, **“and to all,”** *“may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another **and to all**”* (v. 12)

Expressions of Christian love and charity will begin with our fellow Christian, but they should not be limited to our fellow Christians. Paul wrote to the Galatians: *“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) **Lord increase our love!** Enable us to do good to all! When we are kind and loving to all the Lord will open doors of opportunity to share the greatest good of the gospel with

those who need it. Let us do good to all. Let us love even as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us love with a self-sacrificing love that others may see the love of Christ through the deeds of love we do toward them. In this world at this time there is such a great need for the true love of God to be shared.

Finally, we look forward to the fulfillment of our hope of life and salvation in Christ's glorious return. We pray:

III. Lord Prepare Us for Christ's Return.

For the Thessalonian Christians Paul prayed: *"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."* (1 Thessalonians 3:13) Notice that Paul is already calling them **"saints."** That means they are among the holy ones of God! We also are among those whom God has declared to be righteous and holy before Him. We along with the saints in the rest of the world are made holy by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

So, what is it that we are to pray about? It is all about our sanctified Christian life. We live in the midst of a sinful world that appeals to our own sinful nature. The devil is very adept at enticing us into all manner of sinful desires, and then into sin itself, and sin when it is finished brings forth death. The Apostle James warns us with these words, *"Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."* (James 1:14-15)

It is nothing less than foolishness to think that we are immune to falling into sin, sin that can indeed cause us to fall from faith. Our strength is insufficient to ward off all the lusts of the flesh. Even the Apostle Paul confessed, *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ... ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

(Romans 7:18-19, 24-25)

Sin is knocking at the door every day, and by nature we are more inclined to open the door to our sinful desires than we are to open the door to Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. We need this prayer, Lord keep us steadfast in the faith. **Lord prepare us for Christ's return.** It is our desire as children of God to be found blameless in holiness at His return. This will happen, but not because we are so good. It will happen because of the gracious and powerful working of the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word of God! What we pray for is that as we come together this Advent season and the whole year as well, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us against the temptations of the devil, and the lusts of the world, and the passionate desires of our own sinful flesh. It's a fruit of the Spirit that we say "no" to sin, and live lives that glorify our God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a fruit of the Spirit that turns our eyes upward so that we watch with eager anticipation for the glorious reappearing of Jesus. It is to the praise and glory of the Holy Spirit that we will be found blameless on that day.

As we enter a new church year today let us begin with Our Prayer for Advent Preparation: Lord, Deepen Our Faith; Lord, Increase Our Love; Lord, Prepare Us for Christ's Return.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.