

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

Sermon: “Rejoice”

In our Epistle for today, Paul directs us to *“rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances”* (1

Thessalonians 5:16–18). And on this Third Sunday in Advent, the Church encourages us to rejoice in the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But when we look around ourselves and in ourselves, we often find little for which to rejoice. Yes, we look forward to celebrating the coming of the Son of God at Christmas. But when we look inside ourselves, this joy can be dampened, it can be quenched.

We have not been the consistently faithful servants God calls us to be. We have faltered in our prayers. We have neglected to give thanks as we ought. Our sin can cause us to fail to know the joy of God’s salvation. Nevertheless, in the Epistle for today, Paul would bid us once again to Rejoice! For God is faithful to make and keep us holy in Christ.

Daily, we are unfaithful in living out the Christian lives God wills for us. For we sin daily. Even in good times, we are sporadic at best in rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks. We don't rejoice, pray, or give thanks continually as God wills (vs 16–18).

God says we are to do this always, without ceasing, in all circumstances. Sometimes we rejoice when the unexpected happens, the good times. Mostly we only pray when things are going very wrong or when we need or want something.

And we often forget to give thanks to God for all his benefits. We often despise or ignore God's Word when it tells us what to do and what not to do (v 19). We neglect his Word. We plug our ears to God's commands and prohibitions. We want to do what we want to do. We do not hold fast the good or test everything but instead embrace evil (vs 21–22).

Paul says, ***“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things”*** (Philippians 4:8).

We readily listen uncritically to voices that sound appealing, theology that sacrifices Scripture for the spirit of our times, the latest self-help fad that makes me, rather than my Lord, my true helper. Because of our sinful nature we want to be in control and that leads to death, eternal death. For without Christ we are lost.

We buy into all kinds of evil that our world advertises, pornography, premarital sex, unscriptural divorce, homosexuality, and the list is extensive. Satan is after all the master of trickery, deceit and lies.

Rarer still is our joy, prayer, and thanksgiving in times of troubles or evil. We are not joyful during trial and tribulation. Joy is different from happiness. We do not need to be happy.

But we should still be joyful in Christ. After all Christ is our all in all. He is our hope, our peace, our comfort, and our joy. He is our salvation. We may pray but we too easily despair and give up hope especially when things aren't going the way we think they should. We cannot imagine giving thanks during such evil times.

The Holy Spirit continually works in our lives to move us to do just what Paul says here, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God..." When we intentionally refuse to do these things, we thwart the Spirit's work in us.

But God is ever faithful to make us holy in Christ Jesus (v 23a). Christ comes into the world as the Prince of Peace, and in his spirit, soul, and body, he works holiness for us. He lived the holy life in the body, fulfilling all that God here commands us. And by his Baptism by John, he ***"sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin"*** (LSB, p 269).

After giving thanks on the night when he was betrayed, knowing what was coming, he gave to us the very sustenance of that sacrifice. For the joy set before him and holding fast to the good result, Christ shed his holy, precious blood on the cross to make peace between God and all people. Then, Christ sends the Holy Spirit to make us holy by his Gospel.

Martin Luther summarizes the work of the Holy Spirit in this way in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed: **“The Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.”** He makes us holy through Holy Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection.

In Holy Absolution, he forgives us (as Christ prayed even from his cross). He prophesies to the holiness that is ours in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel.

He will surely keep you ***“blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (v 23). The Holy Spirit will remain faithful to the end to perfect us in holiness. As Luther states in the very last portion of his explanation of the Third Article: **“On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.”**

And even now, we have a foretaste of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blameless and faithful Lamb of God comes and gives you his holy body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

In this way, Christ gives into our body his very own holiness to assure us of our holiness in him. And he strengthens us in holy living.

Though we are not continuously faithful in this life, due to the weakness of our sinful bodies, we may indeed rejoice that he who came in the flesh is not only blameless but also perfectly faithful to sanctify and keep us blameless in spirit and soul and body at his glorious and final advent.

Amen