

December 2, 2018  
Sermon for 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup> as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? <sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Go back in time with me for a little bit. Before cell phones and text messages.

Even before landlines and daily mail that could bring you a letter in a couple of days or even overnight. Go back to the days of the apostle Paul, when you didn't have mailboxes or telephones or telegrams or even the Pony Express. If you wanted to find out something about someone else living in a different town, you had to travel there yourself or send someone to find out for you. It could take days, weeks, or even months before you heard back.

You just had to wait and wait and wait—and go on with life while you waited.

The apostle Paul had waited for Timothy to come back. He wasn't able to visit the congregation that he'd started in the town of Thessalonica. But he knew the people in that church were suffering from persecution.

They were being pressured to give up their faith. And Paul wanted to know what was happening to them. So he sent Timothy to find out.

And then he waited. And he waited some more, until one day, Paul catches sight of Timothy. Can't you picture him, maybe dropping what he was doing and hurrying down the street to hear the news. He's so happy to see Timothy is safe and gives him a big bear hug and then, asks the question "What's the news? What's happening to the believers at Thessalonica? Are they still together?", Are they still calling on the name of the Lord?" And since Timothy had good news, he probably would have had a big smile on his face and say, "Yes, they're standing strong in the faith. They haven't given up on Jesus."

“It’s good, Paul. Lots of good news in Thessalonica.”

And Paul is so thankful. Can’t you see him offering up a prayer of thanksgiving?

“Thank you Lord for what You have done. Thank You for keeping these believers in faith. Thank You for this joyous news. Thank You, Lord!” He simply can’t thank God enough for the great good news Timothy has brought about the Church in Thessalonica.

But then, Timothy fills him in on what else is going on in that church., which is recorded later in the book of 1 Thessalonians.

Not all is good. Something is lacking in their faith, in the way they’re living out their lives of faith. And so Paul gets busy writing a letter back to them. He prays that he can come and see them soon. He prays that these believers will abound and increase in love. He prays that they will be found holy and blameless on the Last Day when Jesus comes back.

God answered part of that prayer as Paul did get to see them again. He will answer another part of that prayer on the Last Day, when Jesus returns and those who remained faithful to Jesus will be blameless and holy before God.

But what about that part of the prayer where Paul asks that the Thessalonians increase and abound in love? What was lacking in this congregation that Paul would offer up that prayer to God?

We can’t say in detail, but right after this prayer, Paul encourages the people there to please God more and more by not falling into sexual immorality. He encourages them to please God by keeping this gift honorable and pure.

Then he urges them to love more and more by the way they do their work so that others will respect them. Finally, he teaches them about what will happen to those who die before Jesus comes back.

Now, I want you to imagine what report Timothy would bring back about St Peter Lutheran Church. Picture Paul saying, "Now, Timothy, this time go to that congregation in *Bowie* and find out about the believers there." Time passes. Timothy visits. He comes back to Paul. The greeting is warm, and again there's a big hug between the two of them. Then: "What did you find out?"

"Oh, Paul, so much to be thankful for. Jesus is at work in this congregation. I was at a worship service, and I heard them confess that they believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You should have heard it, Paul. Almost everyone there heard and believed what wonderful things Jesus had done for them. The day I was there, they heard about Jesus riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey. They heard about the cry that went up about Jesus as the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

So many there knew what happened after that palm-waving parade during that final week of Jesus' life. They confessed this creed that summarized the teaching of God's Word. They confessed that He was beaten and crucified for them. Jesus on the cross for them was proclaimed. They trust that Jesus was resurrected from the dead for their final day resurrection, when they will be presented blameless before God.

It was glorious, Paul. Jesus is present in that congregation and people believe.

“What’s more, on the walls of the church buildings you can see crosses and pictures of Jesus. One of them has Jesus welcoming children. You should see it, Paul. On Wednesdays children come to the church after school . They learn so much—about God and Jesus and His disciples. All, the teachers are committed to showing the children the love of Jesus and teaching them how to be His disciples. You’d be so pleased, Paul.

“They also have people who show the love that comes from that faith in Jesus. Some give food to those who are hungry. They do things for widows and orphans. Single parents and so much more. They have people who are generous to those in need. When someone dies, so much support and comfort is given through the people. They love one another and show it in so many ways.

It’s just wonderful to see the care they have for each other and the community in which they live. It’s good, Paul, at St Peter.”

And Paul would give thanks. Can’t you see him offering up a prayer of thanksgiving? “Yes, Lord, thank you for what you have done. Thank you for keeping these believers in their faith. Thank you, Lord, for this joyous news. Thank you, Lord!”

But then Timothy would tell him that not all is good at *St Peter*. “Paul, you need to know that the people there are still lacking in their faith and living out their faith. During the worship services, I saw empty seats. Many of the members don’t attend the services and some come only some of the time.

People are missing out on worshiping Jesus. Some ministries have to be cut back. The teachers work hard, but they have so much to do and not a whole

lot of help. And the kids, well, they can be kids, you know. And some parents aren't very supportive in getting their children there, some say it's just not worth the trouble.

People get sick, and they are so afraid of pain and death. The community they live in is struggling, too. There are problems with illegal drugs. And so much has gone wrong when it comes to God's gift of sexuality. People don't get along, and they resort to violence. The people are afraid of what the future holds for them. Some are just struggling to keep Jesus in their everyday lives.

They're getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birth in a season they call Advent. It's supposed to be a time to reflect on what our Lord came to do when He was born in Bethlehem. They have extra services on Wednesdays; they have concerts and programs. What happens, though, is that the people are so busy with shopping, parties, decorations, and traveling—added to the usual errands, work, sports, TV, video games, and smart-phones, that they lose sight of Jesus. It gets so hard for them to catch their breath and spend time with Jesus. I could go on Paul, but not all is good.”

And then Paul might sit down and write us a letter. Not a letter of condemnation, but a letter of support and hope!

And more importantly, forgiveness!  
And included in that letter would be a prayer. He would pray that our love would increase and abound more and more.  
And how would that prayer be answered? Just like it was with the Thessalonians.

It's answered when we resist this world's Temptations.

It's answered when we work honestly and in such a way that people will respect us for the jobs we do, when we do our work in the calling God has given us to do. If a teacher, to teach well. If a police officer, to enforce the law fairly. If a sales clerk, to treat people with respect. If an office worker, to work diligently. If retired, to volunteer joyfully. If a painter, to make sure you didn't miss any spots. If a business owner, to care for the workers and customers.

Paul's prayer is answered when we honor God with our work so that others may see what we do as being done in Jesus' name. *(Here could be inserted the illustration from the Ideas for Illustrating section.)*

And that prayer about abounding in love is answered when we hold fast to the one true faith until Jesus returns. Despite our sinful natures, We are holy in Jesus. We are blameless in His forgiveness. The prayer is answered when we're looking forward to that day of His return, when we'll join all the saints, including those at Thessalonica, in the new creation he's prepared for us.

I can imagine Paul putting down his pen and offering up a prayer for us. "I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son and my Savior. Thank you, Lord, for the people of St Peter. Thank you for the faith You have given them. Thank You that they are holding on to Jesus when so many pressures are trying to pull them away. I pray that You send Your Holy Spirit into their lives that their love abounds all the more."

I've taken quite a bit of liberty with St Paul this morning, but I hope you've understood my musings. We aren't a perfect church, and neither were any of the

ones in Biblical times. That is why Paul wrote so many letters, even more than are recorded in our Bibles. We all have different cares and concerns, and problems, but the cause of the problems is the same for all of the churches in history, in the present and will be in the future too...sin.

But thankfully, we all have the same cure, and it is 100% effective. Faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior. As we call upon Christ and receive that forgiveness, let us go forward and put those sins behind us. As encouraged the Thessalonians, so too he encourages us.

Let us go back to work and to our lives, seeking to abound and increase more and more in our love for one another and for the people who are struggling in this world. We work in the knowledge of our forgiveness and in response to that wonderful gift, let's treat each other as forgiven children of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Looking forward ot that day ahead when we will appear holy and blameless before God because of Jesus and His dying love for us.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

## **Sermon Outline**

### ***Waiting for news***

*1 Thessalonians 3:9-13*

- I. Paul thanks God and prays for the Thessalonians.
- II. We have much to be thankful for, yet our love still needs to grow
- III. As Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, we need to pray for each other.