

December 7, 2014
Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 (ESV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil. ²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Uncertainty breeds anxiety. I'm sure you've heard that phrase before...or maybe you have lived it, or are living there now. What isn't yet set or determined or certain or done naturally makes us nervous.

Those of you who are students at any level, or have students in your household have just wrapped up their finals before Christmas. Waiting and wondering you're your grades are certainly brings anxiety.

Waiting for results from a medical test—that's a lot harder still. Until the lab calls with a clean bill of health, we probably worry.

Wondering how in the world you are going to pull off a Merry Christmas this year might be your bigger worry right now. Things aren't so merry at home right now, how can I be excited about the birth in Bethlehem when I don't know what is dfor supper tomorrow night.

So, in times that may be every bit that anxious—for other reasons too—it may not be easy to hear Paul's exhortation to us this morning: "*Rejoice always.*"

In fact, with so much uncertainty in life, it may be difficult to hear a whole lot of things God says to us through the apostle in our Text. Paul actually gives us quite a lengthy list of things that ought to reflect the sanctified, holy life of the Christian: three "dos" and three "don'ts."

How are we ever going to rejoice—or be anything like the holy, sanctified people we're supposed to be—when so many things in our future seem so uncertain?

Let's see what Paul has to say.

Paul commands three "Dos" in our sanctification.

Do rejoice always (v 16).

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy is observable and contagious. But that doesn't make it easy especially when we're anxious about so many, many real-life, everyday uncertainties. The economy looks ok right now. Gas prices are going down. But that's good news for some, and bad news for others.

We are anxious for our health, our children and sometimes even our parents, no to mention that state of the world. If you look, there are plenty of earthly reasons not to rejoice!

Let's try another one, this one might be easier.

Do pray without ceasing (v 17).

Relationships grow with communication. That's true of human relationships, and it's true as we exercise our relationship with God in prayer.

Trust eases anxiety. If you ever snuggled in your mothers arms during a thunderstorm, or slept more soundly at night because you knew your father was home, you know exactly what I am talking about.

On an even bigger scale, knowing God invites us to bring our cares before His throne of grace is a glorious relief!

But can we really be sure He answers? He hears a lot of prayers, what if I'm not important enough...what if I'm too anxious even to pray?

Well that was tough too, lets try this last one.

Do give thanks in all circumstances (v 18a).

The Gospel breeds an attitude of gratitude and an even humility. We have been given so much in Jesus Christ. His suffering, death and Resurrection promises life and salvation through faith in Him.

We have a lot to be grateful for, being grateful even in adversity is evidence of spiritual maturity.

But how can I be grateful when I don't even know if I'll have a job or my health or my best friend tomorrow?

Wow, this is tougher than I thought.

How about we take a look at Paul's three "Don'ts" in our sanctification.

Don't quench the Spirit (v 19).

Quenching the Spirit occurs when we avoid the means by which the Spirit works in us, when we keep ourselves away from God's Word and Sacrament. We're too busy with the world and other things to take time out to spend any time with God and His Word. We find time and use any excuse not to attend church because let's face it, we believe that there are much better places that we could be.

The Comforter can't comfort us if we shut him out. If we let everything else in the world take His place. But sometimes, I don't feel all that comforted, even when I come here for preaching and the Lord's Supper.

I still have to face Monday—and I don't know what it will bring. But God does and He has already made plans especially for you.

Paul's next do not is: ***Don't despise prophecies*** (vv 20–21).

This can occur when we look for spectacular manifestations—special signs or messages from God—rather than the Word God gives us in Scripture.

It also occurs when God does speak to us clearly in His Word and we think we or the world know better.

But sometimes I wish God would just tell me how I'm going to make ends meet this month! But He does promise to never leave us nor forsake us, and He will provide, maybe not how we expect, but He will.

Paul also tells us: *Don't* give in to evil (v 22).

This refers to all forms of evil, including false teachers—like those on TV who promise us exactly what we'd like to hear about our futures: health and wealth, always with a big smile. They sound really good, but you've heard the expression, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Listening to such evil—promises God hasn't promised—will ultimately disappoint and only increase our anxiety.

But what *does* God promise me?

Paul declares two “Wills” and one “Done” for our sanctification.

This is the **will** of God in Christ Jesus for you: **your sanctification** (vv 16–18; 4:3).

Sanctification means being made holy. We speak of sanctification in at least two ways: the whole person being holy, and our works (what we do) being holy.

Both are God's will for us. He wants us to be holy people, and He wants us to live lives that reflect that—doing good works, loving Him, and loving our neighbor in all kinds of ways. Not for our salvation, because Jesus won that on the cross for us, but in response for what He has already done.

Some of these are the “Dos” and “Don'ts” Paul lists here in our text: rejoicing, praying, avoiding evil. God truly *wills* all these for us.

He **will** surely do it: sanctify you completely (vv 23–24).

What God wills, He always *will* do—and do all the way.

See, God does this! It's not up to us. It is God who makes us holy! It's not a matter of how hard we try or how confident and joyful we happen to feel on a particular day.

And God doesn't do a halfway job; He **will** sanctify us completely: "*your whole spirit and soul and body.*" Your heart, your thoughts, your physical being—it's all holy, perfect; you are God's best handiwork whether you see it or not.

All the way, through all our uncertainties about tomorrow, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, until He comes back and takes us to heaven on the Last Day. He will! That's a sure thing!

But how? And how about between now and then?

Well, actually, all of this has been *done* (vv 23–24).

Did you notice?

Paul says our whole spirit and soul and body will surely be "**kept**" blameless. Not made blameless. Kept blameless. Making us blameless has already been done.

We were made blameless when Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross. ***It is finished!*** Done! All people were justified.

And then when you were baptized, what Jesus did— has done—on the cross was made yours personally.

That's been done, set in concrete, for you! Your baptismal certificate has the date, but more importantly, God doesn't forget. Nothing can undo it. Your sins were washed away. You were made blameless, justified.

Now then, you see, your sanctification is a result of God's action, *not yours*.

And, because you are holy, you also do holy things.

The fact that you are holy—and know that God *will* keep you that way—is the reason you rejoice;

it's the reason you know He'll really answer your prayer;

it's the thing you give thanks for.

It's what the Spirit keeps telling you here in the Word and Sacrament,

the promise He does make to you, through faithful teachers.

We Do Rejoice—and, in Fact,

Are Sanctified Completely—

Because of the One Done.

Done in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Go, prepare to celebrate His birth, but celebrate not only that He came, but for what He has already done for the world...done...for you.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds unto Christ Jesus.

Amen

Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the glory

“Paul’s ‘Dos’ and ‘Don’ts’ in our Sanctification”

1 Thessalonians 5:16 – 24

1. Three “Dos” in our sanctification.
2. Three “Don’ts” in our sanctification.
3. Two “Wills” and one “Done” for our sanctification.