

Sermon Notes December 17, 2017

All readings for Advent 3 http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Advent/BAdv3_RCL.html

Focus 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

I edited this from L. Ann Jervis, Professor of New Testament, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, who writes for workingpreacher.org

This passage connects being made completely holy with the 2nd coming of Jesus. Paul's conviction is that "the God of peace" will keep the "spirit and soul and body" blameless throughout. "The Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God." (1 Thessalonians 4:16). At this dramatic moment, the dead who are 'in Christ' will rise (4:16) and then those who are alive will be "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17).

We can expect that our spirits, souls and bodies will be without blame and remain blameless at Christ's return. Thessalonians is the only time Paul refers to human beings as having three parts: spirit, soul and body. Typically Paul speaks of only two aspects to a human person: the spirit and the body (1 Corinthians 5:3,4). He covers all the bases here.

The coming of Christ is not about us and if we are worthy or not- "the one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it." (5:24). At the same time, Paul focuses attention on God's fundamental role in keeping us pure, he also exhorts his converts to participate in their own holiness. While God will "sanctify you wholly" (5:23), at the same time we have an obligation to grow toward holiness. There is a partnership between God and those 'in Christ.' God's part of the bargain is faithfulness to complete the job of sanctification--making us completely holy.

Our task is to direct our energies towards the holiness God offers and enables. This includes always rejoicing, praying constantly, giving thanks in all things, not suppressing the spirit, not despising prophesying, holding fast to what is good and abstaining from every form of evil. In the contours of Paul's thought holiness is fed by rejoicing, continual prayer, and giving thanks in all circumstances.

Prayer and thanksgiving are closely related to joy and all are responses to and reflections of trust in God through Christ. For Paul, trust in God is manifest in joy, prayer and thanksgiving. In a different letter -- The recipe he gives his converts in Philippi for having no anxiety--that is, to be full of trust in God--is to rejoice and let their requests be made known to God in prayer and thanksgiving. The peace of God, Paul says, will then keep them in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

Paul thinks that trust in God should be the fundamental stance of human beings. It is the mode of life exemplified by Christ and how those who are 'in Christ' are to live. This is why Paul re-names his converts 'believers'. Their primary identity after conversion to faith in Christ is belief--trust. Paul claims that the source of wickedness is lack of trust in God (Romans 1:18-25).

Indications of trust in God, such as rejoicing always, praying constantly and giving thanks in all circumstances, are a means to holiness. Trust in God is critical and essential in order to achieve sanctity. There is a partnership between God and us -- believers -- in the growth of holiness in expectation of the return of Christ. Paul is certain that God will do God's part, for God is faithful.

THEREFORE
**ENCOURAGE
ONE ANOTHER
AND
BUILD
ONE ANOTHER UP**
JUST AS YOU ARE DOING

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11



Third Sunday of Advent

This is the way Paul prepared the way of the Lord.
I hope you have prepared your heart for God this Advent.

See you next week for Christmas! Pastor Todd