

Second Sunday in Advent

December 6, 2009

Sermon Title: The Lord's Working is Our Joy

Sermon Text: Philippians 1:3-11 (Series C)

Sermon Hymn: *On Jordan's Bank the Baptists Cry* [LSB 344]

Sermon Prayer: May the Lord preserve us as a people prepared and increasingly excited for the second coming of our Savior.

Sermon Outline:

I. Paul's joy was not so much in specific works as it was in God's working in us (vs. 3-6).

II. Our joy is not so much in specific good works as it is in God's working in us and others (vs. 7).

III. Our love for others is Jesus' love through us (vs. 8-10).

IV. "to the glory and praise of God" (vs. 11).

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

It would be interesting to hear the opinion, or the impression, everyone here has of Apostle Paul. To hear what kind of man each of you think he was. Yes, we're all aware; he was a devout believer in Jesus Christ. But, personality wise, what was he like? When I think of Apostle Paul I think of him as a somewhat reserved man, perhaps quiet and shy in certain social settings. Yet, a serious, no-nonsense kind of guy, with all interest and focus on truth- the truth that comes only through Jesus Christ.

This is certainly the impression I get when I read anything from his epistles. He was serious about what he was writing and communicating. He didn't hold back when something needed to be said, that's for sure. In the same way that's how he communicated any truth, especially the truth of God's love for all people through Jesus Christ.

Yet, when you read what we have today from Philippians, you notice something about Paul. I guess it could be said he had a soft spot. The book is one of Paul's most personal letters. Very comforting and quite personal for anyone who reads the book.

In verse 7 you can see the tone of what he writes to these Christians in Philippi. "*It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,...*" "It is right for me to feel this way about you all,..." To me that means Paul has considered his feelings in all seriousness. And, he has concluded that his feeling for these people was legitimate and based on the right thing.

But, what was Paul's feelings toward these people exactly? Well, let's consider Paul's situation at the time he wrote this. Paul was under house arrest. There, because many considered Paul's preaching and testimony of Jesus Christ to be against Roman law. He was waiting for the outcome of his appeal to Caesar. Paul really had no idea what the outcome was going to be, or what Caesar was going to decide. But, we do know that it didn't matter to Paul whether it meant he could continue living or die. For whatever the outcome, it would mean vindication of the very Gospel he'd been preaching.

The Christians in Philippi, bless their hearts, sent Epaphroditas, one of their own in fellowship, to Paul with a gift for him. Obviously it was a gift that helped Paul immensely, and one for which Paul was extremely grateful and appreciative.

Being presented with a gift can bring out anyone's soft spot. Consider the weeks leading up to Christmas. Most struggle with finding that perfect gift that will hit the soft spot of that loved one. Listen to the wording Paul uses, that we've already heard in our Epistle reading. *"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."* Sounds as if the first thing Paul thinks of after receiving his gift from the Christians in Philippi, is 'God,' and their 'partnership' with him 'in the gospel'.

Now a little later Paul tells them: *"I hold you in my heart"*. Yes, Paul loved these people. He certainly felt very close to them. Why? Well Paul goes on to tell them why he held them in his heart, why he felt so close to them, it was because they were, verse 7, *"partakers"* with him *"of grace"*.

Paul was serious about this, he was making it very clear, his first love...was Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus, meant more to Paul more than anyone else, more than anything else, including his own life. That's why it did not matter to Paul whether he lived or died after Caesar's verdict. Whatever it would be it would be to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Paul's love for these Christians in Phillipi was because, was due to, Jesus' love for him. To Paul, and he was serious about this, the gift of Jesus Christ, was not only the best gift ever, but the only gift that lasted forever. He was willing to lose his own life so others could have Jesus Christ.

Thing of it is, when Paul received his gift from the Christians in Philippi, he realized some feelings he had toward them. He thought it through and was sure the love of Jesus was in their hearts and that is why they gave him the gift they did. And, if they had done this, He knew the love of Jesus would shine through them to others as well, in the hope that others who need Jesus, would receive Him. Others having Jesus,... that's what mattered most to Paul. And, since that is what mattered most to Paul, Paul's joy was found not so much in what Christians did, but the God's working through Christians.

Could we ever be as great as Apostle Paul? Could we ever be as courageous and as convicted as he was? These really, friends, are not questions we should ask. Now,...can the Lord work in us and through us the way He did with Paul? Absolutely. The faith Paul had,...well, we have it, and we have it no differently. The priority in life Paul had, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ came first before all else, well,...we've been given that same priority. For those of us who have been baptized, we have been given hearts like Paul's, minds like his- that is, hearts and minds set upon Jesus Christ and His Promise of forgiveness for all. Likewise, for all of us who have received that same Promise through our Lord's Word.

And, as the Lord's own, those washed, redeemed, and forgiven, Jesus is number One, for He is the One who has given us the only true life there is. Thus, He who loved us in such a way- to suffer and die for His own enemies, us, in order to save us, He has become first love for each of us.

We do give gifts as Christians. And, certainly, the love of Jesus has shown through us to others. Yet, I will have to say, because this is true of myself, it is easy to stress over what to do as a believer in Jesus Christ. We know we should be telling others about Jesus. We should be sharing His love, mercy, and grace with others. But, then we stress over how we are going to do it. Friends, the thing of it is, we just do it. It is not something we think about. It's not something we hesitate about. All because it is not about us. It is about the One who made Himself our first love, the One who served us and loved us first, Jesus Christ. In fact, I'm sure we can count on it,...most of the time when we do share with others the Promise of Jesus Christ, we really don't stop to think about what we're doing because we are so driven by Jesus' love and so concerned for the person we are sharing with.

Let me read to again verse 6, “*And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” This is what Paul said to those Christians in Philippi. Here in these words we have indication that Paul is serious,...it really is all about God and what He does to people through His Son, Jesus Christ. That is, that He delivers us from the bondage of sin and death unto life and freedom of service in the Lord. He makes the hopeless into the those saturated with hope in life everlasting. And, God has done this in a way which seems so strange to the world, through the suffering, bloodshed, and death of His own Son.

This is the very ‘*good work*’ Paul is speaking of, the work that God did to us through His own Son. And, the completion at the day of Jesus Christ Paul is speaking of, that is our entrance to life eternal in Heaven which we have been Promised.

Yes, the gift presented to Paul brought about some terrific feelings. Yet, even as Paul would readily tell us, it is not about the feelings. Nothing wrong with feelings at all. But it is about the simple historical fact of Jesus’ death and Resurrection. Now, what His death and Resurrection won for us, that gift,...we can expect to have feelings over it, just as Paul had.

Speaking of gifts, the time of the year is coming when more gifts are presented than any other time, that is Christmas. Why do we give gifts this time of year? Because we love each other? Of course. We’ve all heard it said, ‘Jesus is the reason for the season’. That’s true. When we consider what we have been given in Jesus Christ,...how can we keep from sharing that same gift with others. In Jesus, we are completely forgiven, we are saved from what we deserve, eternal death, and we have been made heirs of what we do not deserve, eternal life in Paradise.

To anyone who has received THAT gift- there is no gift that matches it. It is THE gift! And, the One who gave the gift, the Lord God, is number One. And, that is why we celebrate Christmas the way we do. When we give the gifts we do to those we love, remind them why. It is simply in response to the greatest gift you have been given and that is Jesus Christ, Savior of the world.

Yes, friends, we are just like Paul. We deserve nothing but death and eternal punishment, Paul did too. We have received, that is, we have been gifted, with something totally undeserved, forgiveness for our sins and life-everlasting in Heaven. And, we did nothing to

earn such a gift. To us, the Holy Spirit has made this gift the most important thing in our lives, and Jesus Christ who won it all for us, number One in our lives and in our hearts.

In our Gospel reading we hear of the son of Zechariah, John the Baptist. John was the one prophesied from of old as the one crying in the wilderness: '*Prepare the way of the Lord.*' There was the time certain crowds came to him at the river to be baptized and John said to them, "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.*" Fairly harsh sounding. But, John was no different from Paul, or from you or me. To John it was about Jesus Christ. And, for one who has been made sure of who Jesus is and what He has done for all, how can you keep from kneeling before the Lord in true repentance?

To those John referred to as a "*brood of vipers*", to them it was about them and the specific '*good*' things they did, and not about Jesus Christ, the Promised Savior.

Friends, our lives are all about Jesus Christ. That is who gave us life, the only life that exists. He purchased our lives by giving us His own. We are always before our Lord in humility, but in joy. We are always looking to others as those who also need Jesus as we do. The love Jesus Christ had for the world is the only true love and that love shines through us, is reflected off of our lives onto others. Amen.