

Sermon December 13th 2020  
Advent 3

“May the words from my lips and the meditations of our hearts always be pleasing to you O God.”

“Rejoice always”

This Sunday is the 3rd Sunday of Advent - the Sunday for Joy. We lit the candle for Joy at the beginning of the service and we continue with that theme in our scripture readings.

Our reading from 1 Thessalonians is the perfect one for the Sunday of Joy.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is most certainly our earliest Christian writing. It was probably written in the year 50 or 51. It is early in Paul's apostolic career and not too far in time from Christ's crucifixion. He was writing to a young Church, a new Church that he had founded in what today is northern Greece. The themes in this letter will develop more fully in the letter to the Corinthians and in Romans.

This is Paul the Pastor. Blessing and praying and encouraging. This is not Paul scolding.

At this time of year we are busy with our preparations for Christmas. Often this includes preparing special meals or spending time baking. This time of year we often turn to beloved family recipes. Perhaps special foods that make us think of family and Christmas' of the past. Or maybe you are trying new recipes - things that caught your eye on a cooking show or blog or magazine. This is the season for recipes.

In our reading today from 1 Thessalonians Paul gives us a recipe for the Christian life. I am reminded of the words from the prophet Micah - what is required of you O mortal but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

Paul adds a bit more. Living the Christian life is about rejoicing always, praying without stopping and giving thanks in all circumstances. When Paul talks about praying without ceasing he is talking about a way of life. Of being open to God at all times and in all places. Listening for God's word and direction. Keeping a conversation going. What about rejoicing always? This might be much more difficult. Sometimes we do not feel very joyful. Sometimes we are sad, anxious, fearful, angry and grieving. How do we rejoice when we feel like that? Paul would probably tell us it is not really about how you

are feeling. It is more about how you are living. Approach your life with joy - not fear. This joy will make you open to many things - will let you say yes to abundant life in Christ. And next we deal with giving thanks. Sometimes we forget to say thank you. Sometimes we muddle along - focused on our own plans, dreams, work and commitments. Paul would remind us that we have nothing - are nothing without God. Giving thanks -again is about being open to the Holy Spirit in your life. This is a way of life. Keeping an attitude of thanksgiving. Being truly thankful for who you are and the life that you have.

I sometimes have a rocky relationship with Paul. Sometimes I do not want to hear what he has to say. Sometimes I do not agree with what he has to say. Today's reading from 1 Thessalonians is different. I love these words from Paul. Paul's recipe for how to live the Christian life. Paul's family recipe. Paul's wisdom - listen to the prophets - do not accept everything at face value - be cautious and test things. Hold fast to what is good and stay away from what is evil - and learn to know the difference!

Rejoice always!!! Again I say Rejoice! Pray without stopping. And give thanks for everything.

A recipe for how to live the Christian life and how to do it in community.

Paul ends this letter with a blessing. May the God of peace sanctify you....may your body and soul and body be kept sound and blameless. Paul is talking about wholeness. Being made whole. The Thessalonians could not make themselves whole - and neither can we. God makes us whole. God who wants us to live and love abundantly. To be full of Joy. To be open and to be whole. For as Paul reminds us....the one who calls you is faithful.

God who is faithful calls you to wholeness.

Use Paul's recipe. Use Paul's family well loved recipe.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks.

AMEN