

December 1, 2012

CHRIST'S LOVE

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

PRAYER

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.¹³And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD:

THANKS BE TO GOD

Tis the season when Christians make preparations to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, and there are only a few weeks remaining to do so! This Sunday also marks the beginning of a new church year. As the church celebrates and remembers Christ's First Advent, Christians also wait in hope for Christ's Second Advent. As Christians we are living in the "between times" between the first and second Advent and are called to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us as God's people.

Context will help us to understand 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13. During the period of Scripture, Paul and his companions came to Thessalonica, and Paul preached the gospel for three Sabbaths. Paul had a pastoral relationship with the Thessalonians and also a relationship with them as a "nursing mother taking care of her own children," as a father who exhorts and encourages his children, and as brothers and sisters loved by God. It is this familial concern that is behind this epistle. Paul was "torn away" from them, and he was anxious to know if they had abandoned the faith because of harassments, doubts and slander levied against them and Paul. Not knowing drove Paul to send Timothy back to Thessalonica.

Upon his return, Timothy brought the good news that indeed the new Christians had remained firm in the faith. This news brought exceeding joy and thanksgiving to Paul and his companions, which brings us to today's reading.

In our text, we see the biblical principle of love. Paul offers prayer and blessing to the Thessalonian believers: that God would bring them together soon, that their love for each other and for all people would increase, and that God would strengthen their hearts in holiness. In this passage to the Thessalonians, Paul prays to both God and Jesus. First he prays to God – God the Supreme and Majestic Being of the universe; the Creator and Maker of all living things; the Giver and Sustainer of life; the first Person of the Trinity that dwells everywhere in perfect supreme power. For Christians this is our image of an Almighty God. But even with these supreme adjective and description – our God is so very much more. Our God is not located in some far off galaxy removed from earthly Creation. No, God dwells right here in Wisconsin – zoom in closer – Salem, Wisconsin; no, closer still, 25130 85th Street Salem, WI 53168 – now look within and you will find God is right here – right now in the hearts of each and every one of us actively and lovingly participating in each of our lives.

After prayers were prayed to God, Paul prayed prayers to our Lord Jesus Christ – the Supreme Majestic Ruler of Creation who willingly gave up His Divinity and heavenly existence because of His love for us, came to earth as a human child, ministered on earth and then did the unthinkable - He died. He died for your sins and for my sins. His precious blood was shed so that all who believe or trust in Him would have a right relationship with God.

And I believe that Paul also gave a plug for the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit was central to Paul's theology; he believes that the Old Testament promise of the giving of the Spirit has been fulfilled. Paul asserts that the Spirit has been conferred upon all believers of Christ. According to Paul, the reason that a believer's hope does not disappoint is that, "the love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

In this power-packed prayer Paul requested that God and Jesus would direct and guide his way back to his beloved Thessalonians. He wanted both God and Jesus to work together to open the door for him to return to these dear believers.

But even if Paul could return immediately – Paul realized that the answer to the Thessalonians dilemma would and could only be solved with love.

The foundation for every CHURCH that seeks to abound in the work of God begins, continues and ends with L-O-V-E – LOVE. The word INCREASE used in the SCRIPTURE means to *multiply over and over*. The word ABOUND means to *excel and overflow*. Therefore, if we as the Church of Jesus Christ are to grow into our neighborhood, grow into our communities, grow into our nation, and grow into our world – then we as Christians must allow the love of Christ to first *multiply and overflow* in us so we can spread this love into the world.

As hearers of the Word this morning, what is your love relationships with those within our congregation? It would seem impractical to even question the love of Christians towards one another. However, do you add to the faith journey of your pew partners? Well, Pastor, I greeted them during Passing of the Peace. However, was it love that you gave them? Is your love for Christ overflowing within you that it permeates through the largest organ of the body – your skin? Does your Christ love grow from the inner most layer of the skin, subcutaneous layer, then to the dermis layer until it reaches the outer layer of the epidermis where, like droplets of perspiration, you are anointed in love and pollinated your pew partners? Now that's Christ love.

During this Advent and Christmas season, many people are friendly and courteous because they are in the “spirit of Christmas,” but what about those relationships throughout the rest of year? Will your Christ love prevail past December 25th? Will they know you by your love after 12 o'clock midnight on the 31st of December?

Paul realized that as long as the good was happening in the lives of the Thessalonians– and in the lives of Salem UMC Christians– we would sprinkle the entire world with love. The Salvation Army bell ringer gets a nod of acknowledgment if not a donation. The homeless person may get a couple of dollars – *well, it is the season of giving, and Santa is especially watchful at this time of the year*. You may even go as far as to be a blessing to the mail carrier or your hair stylist. Wow, this Christ love thing is alright!

But woe is the person, church committee, church member or child of God that crosses your path when persecution, trials and tribulation or hard times comes knocking in your life or the life of a love one. We change from a Christ-loving Transformer, a heroic calming yellow colored Autobot mascot for Christ that shares their gifts, time and tithes for the glorification of God's kingdom, to the attributes of a It's-Sunday-morning-let-me-do-something-good Decepticon. As this type Decepticon, we become weary in doing the work of God and do not let our

Christ light shine so people will see Christ in all aspects of our lives. When this transformation attempts to occur, the antidote is Christ's love in our lives; so Paul says we should pray that will be a Christ-loving Autobot in times of hardship and heartache as well as during seasons of plenty and happiness.

You see what life does to us really depends on what it finds in us. Nothing reveals the inner person like the fiery furnace of trials and tribulations. When problems and struggles come, the truth that is our innermost being rises to the surface. Paul prays that in this time of trial, the truth which will rise to the surface will be Christ love.

So in these times of trials in your life, you do have choices: you can build a wall around you and be isolated. Or you can build a bridge over the roaring, oscillating frothing swells that continue to form and cause a hole to form in your faith. And why do you have a hole in your faith? Well, the reasons are many. You see, someone talked about me at the office Wednesday and I didn't appreciate it and then I just found out the my best friend had cancer and she is the most bestest person in the world so why would God allow this awful disease to happen to her and my parents are getting older and I have to come up with a plan as to how I am going to spend more time with them and care for them 'cause my siblings aren't lifting a finger to help and then those Lay leaders keep asking me to be on a committee and don't leave out my children Toney, Shanique and Fabio each with their own circumstances and need of my time and wallet and my spouse who keeps asking 'where is my time with you; I don't think you love me 'and maybe just maybe in the macrocosm of all this I can carve out a micro-moment for myself. Can you see why I have a hole in my faith?

But I came by to tell you the Good News – I heard the voice of Jesus say I can mend that hole – just grab hold to my life line of love - hold on tight because the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skilful; but time and chance happen to us all – hold on tight as the love of Jesus Christ swings us through our life of circumstances – cling tighter as God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble – just a little while longer because we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. A brand new day happens each morning- you can let go of the life line – take a breath - the storm is passing over – hallelujah – but still hold tight to Christ's hand of love – as you snuggle peacefully in the bosom of God – as God rebirths in each of us love, mercy, hope, joy and faith through the love of Jesus Christ.

May we pray –

Lord, let us carry your love into all the world, because we know that:

There is no marriage that Christ's love cannot strengthen,

There is no fellowship that Christ's love cannot enhance,

No heart that Christ's love cannot soften,

No sorrow that Christ's love cannot relieve.

No lost child that Christ's love cannot save.

Increase our love and cause our love to overflow toward others.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.