

1st Sunday in Advent – Year C
November 29, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
1Thessalonians 3:9-13
Pastor Paul Horn

Abound in Love

⁹ *How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?* ¹⁰ *Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.* ¹¹ *Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.* ¹² *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.* ¹³ *May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

Over the years artists have attempted to describe different kinds of love through their music. Perhaps you've heard these song titles before: "Love is a battlefield." Love is a many splendored thing." "Love stinks." "This crazy little thing called love." What kind of love do you have? What kind of love do you show to each other. You may not have seen it as you read your New Testament, because it's lost in the English translation. But did you know that the original language of the New Testament, Greek, offers four different words for love to describe four different kinds of love. The first is *eros*, from which our English word *erotic* is derived. This type of love is reserved for a husband and wife. The second word is *philos*. You've heard that Philadelphia is called *the city of brotherly love*. Where do you think they got that from? From the Greek language! *Philos* is a love brothers and sisters have for each other. The third word is *agape*. *Agape* love is unconditional, selfless, it seeks out the individual without asking for anything in return. Finally, the last word is *storgay*. This a love between members of a family.

What kind of love do you demonstrate in your words and actions? Depends on whom you are with, right? Depends on what kind of mood you're in? Depends on how that individual treated you in the past? Oh, I think that sometimes we put conditions on the love we show.

In our lesson today the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to Christians who were living in a city called Thessalonica. He encourages the believers there to love each other. vs12 "**May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.**" Can you guess which word he uses for love? *Agape* – the selfless, unconditional love. It's not a coincidence that the apostle uses the same word for love that the Apostle John used in his gospel, "**For God so loved the world...**" loved the world with *agape* love. He sought out a world full of sinners and figured out how to demonstrate love that would benefit them. So he sends only Son to die in their place. I have three sons, and I think you would all have to agree that you nor I would give up any of our sons for someone else. But that is the kind of love God the Father has for the world, *agape* love that overflows. This love led him to save the human race from perishing in its sins and sinful condition. Instead, out of love, he chose to offer salvation and eternal life for those who believe in his Son Jesus. No conditions, no strings attached, this is love, that God loved us.

Paul tells the Thessalonians, “Love each other that way, with love that spills over.” And not just among the family of believers, but as he says in vs12 “**for everyone else.**” Reach out to those who did not know about this agape love that God has shown through his Son Jesus.

The dear apostle is not giving them lip service. He demonstrated that love. If you want to see inside the heart of a true pastor, you will see it here in Paul’s words, vs9 “**How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have because of you?**” Paul is so excited for the Christians in Thessalonica because they were being persecuted. He wasn’t happy about the persecution, but for their resolve in the midst of opposition, how firmly they stood strong. He can’t thank God enough for it!

In vs10 he wrote, “**Day and night we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.**” Even though he was away from them, Paul reminded this congregation that he still kept them in his prayers night and day, even praying in vs11 that God would remove any roadblocks Satan had set up to prevent him from visiting them again. This is the attitude of a true shepherd who cares for his sheep, a pastor who loves his people.

You see, Paul was their spiritual father. Paul had established this congregation in Thessalonica. But he had left them hastily. There were Jews in that city who didn’t believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They didn’t appreciate that he was winning fellow Jews over to Christianity. So they drove him out of town. He had to sneak out under cover of darkness. But the persecution continued after Paul left. The believers were left battered and beaten, like a ship tossed by wind and waves on the sea. So Paul encourages them and says, “Love each other.” Because when you are hard pressed from outside, we don’t need dissension within the ranks. The same is true when soldiers are in combat. Under fire they need to know that the brother or sister next to them has their back, they know the mission and are committed to carrying it out. Paul says, “Love each other...” in order that you **grow stronger** (vs13). Stand firm as you have been doing. Encourage one another by showing love; *agape* love.

I’m sure that this past weekend some of you carried out family traditions that are only done the weekend of Thanksgiving. Some may have gone out-to-eat. Others may have enjoyed a nice quiet meal at home. Still others may have gone all out, the turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, green bean casserole, rolls, pumpkin pie, maybe a glass a wine to wash it all down. And you flopped down on the couch, switched on a little football and took a little snooze. I can’t help but think that at times post-thanksgiving dinner is a picture of our love towards each other; sluggish, lazy, lethargic, less than lively.

And it’s ironic that this often happens on Thanksgiving weekend, when family is gathered. It’s inevitable that there will be some drama, a misunderstanding is blown out of proportion and... not much love is shown. Sadly, this lovelessness happens among the church family. One member’s personality doesn’t mesh with that of another member. One member is frustrated others because of their lack of involvement or they don’t share the same enthusiasm and... not much love is shown. Sadly, this less than loving attitude is demonstrated in the way we deal with others, those outside of our family of believers. Like that neighbor whose dog likes the tree in your yard more than its own. How do you deal with them in a way that shows love? Or that store associate who doesn’t understand the meaning of “customer service.” How do you show love to them? Or maybe you share the hardships of the Christians in Thessalonica. Enemies of

the gospel taunt you, ridicule you, put you down because of your faith. How do you deal with them in love? What kind of love do you show, or do you show none at all? Because your pride and selfishness get in the way, you say to yourself, "I was wronged. I was the one offended. I deserve an apology!" Christ says just the opposite...

He wants to change that sluggish, lethargic, lazy, less than lively love. Just as a last call for pumpkin pie and coffee might make us jump off the couch, Christ's love arouses us from our slumber. His love kindles in us a new fire. When we see his love for us, we can't help but respond. This is the love Jesus Christ showed to us...*agape* love.

This *agape* love moved his Father to make a plan to save humankind from its sin and destiny in hell. Love moved the Son to willingly accept this plan, which meant his coming to earth to take on human flesh and to endure the condition of that flesh; sleeplessness, hunger and pain, sorrow, so that he might live like us, and to love in a way that we cannot; perfectly. Even when he was offended, persecuted, and abused, he loved. That same *agape* love moved Christ Jesus to endure Calvary's mournful mountain climb, to allow his hands and feet to be pierced through with nails, and his body fastened to a tree, and love moved him to suffer the wrath of God. For all of our sins of pride and lovelessness were heaped on him. Love moved Jesus to suffer the punishment our sins deserve and die.

That same *agape* love moved Christ Jesus to give us these gifts of his perfect life of love and his loving sacrifice to us personally through holy baptism. Washed through water and the Word he has made you blameless in God's sight. Love moved Christ Jesus to offer his body and blood in a miraculous way every time you celebrate his holy supper on this altar so that you can be reminded of the price he paid and be strengthened by it. Indeed, his love toward us overflows, like a pot of water left on the stove that boils over, so is our God's love for us.

This is the same kind of love that will overflow in our words and actions to each other. The love we show to others will no longer depend on who they are or what they have done or said to us. The love we will show depends on Christ's love to us, his boundless, overflowing love. And now we have an excellent example of how that love is put into action through the Apostle Paul. First of all he showed his love by praying for the Thessalonians. Not only did he pray for them, he told them that he was praying for them and told them exactly what the content of his prayers was. So also, your love for others will manifest itself when you pray for each other. And you will tell each other that you are praying for one another so that you both may be mutually encouraged. Paul demonstrated *agape* love by encouraging the Thessalonians to use their spiritual gifts. The Christians in that city were very strong in their faith because they stayed strong in the Word and Sacraments. So that when persecution stared them in the face, they stood their ground. When you show love to each other, you will encourage one another. Pat someone on the back and say, "You really did great work with that project." Especially encourage our young people and teens. Point out to them when they do good work. Paul also shared in the burdens of the Thessalonians. He commiserated with them in their suffering. You will show love to each other by empathizing with those who are enduring hardships. Build each other up with God's promises when death, sickness, depression or deployment arrives. Finally, Paul encourages us to love others, who are not part of our Faith family, those who do not yet know Christ's love. Conduct yourselves in such a manner that they see Christ's love in you, and by

God's grace, they too, may one day experience his love through holy baptism.

My dear sisters and brothers, what kind of love will show to each other and everyone else? The same kind of love that was seen in a cradle in Bethlehem, the same kind of love demonstrated on a cross in Jerusalem, especially now in this season of Advent. As we prepare our hearts for Christ's coming it is necessary for us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ's love. We prepare not only for Jesus' coming as the little baby in the manger at Christmas, but more importantly, we prepare for his coming as the Savior and King of the world, when he comes on the clouds with his angels and all the saints to bring us to reign with him in heaven for all eternity. We will always be prepared for his coming as we experience his love through his Word and Sacraments. We will be prepared by showing love to each other. As we close, I want to pray for you, as the apostle Paul did, "**May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.**" Amen.