**2nd Sunday in Advent – Year C – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Philippians 1:3-11 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**You are partners in the gospel**

**I. Grow in knowledge together**

**II. Pray with thanksgiving for each other**

*3I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

*9And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.*

*My sisters and brothers, when I think about you, I always pray for you, and in my prayers I always thank God for you. when I pray for you I have joy in my heart because I hold you close in my heart.*

This is the way the Apostle Paul talked to the members of his congregation. Do you think there were those members in the congregation who gave him fits, who didn’t like the way he preached, some who were pessimistic, some members who, no matter how hard he tried to work with them in counseling, just would not listen or follow through? Sure… but when you read his letter to the Philippians, you don’t hear about any of it. Paul looked past all of that, and he remembered the congregation with fondness. They had a special bond, this congregation and Apostle Paul. They shared something together.

Paul had preached the good news of Jesus with the people in Philippi, Roman colony on the eastern edge of Greece. By God’s grace they believed his message. Not only that, but they worked diligently side-by-side with the Apostle Paul, and shared that gospel message with others in Philippi. They defended the truth of God’s Word as they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Paul.

Now he was in Rome, under house arrest, and couldn’t be with them. But they continued to work – the members of this congregation sent a financial gift to Paul to assist him in his hardship. They continued to share the good news of Jesus with the people in Philippi, even though their pastor wasn’t with them. They had been through a lot together. It was only natural that they had a mutual love and respect for each other. You can begin to see why Paul longed to see them again, why he prayed for them, why he encouraged them.

We can relate… typically the Soldiers who deploy together share a special bond. They went through things downrange that their family and friends in the States may not understand. They are a band of brothers. Superstorm Sandy victims will always share in the tragedy through which they had to persevere. For those who participated in the transition between our old rented storefront church which was home for 15 years, and the building project and the move to this new facility, share a special bond. But we all share in something common… something more….

Like Paul’s relationship with Philippians, we share in God’s grace. We share in one baptism, one faith, one Lord Jesus Christ. We are partners in the gospel. We stand together as one united body of Christ, a bond far more special and important than any experience we’ve had on earth, because we are bound together as partners with our God for eternity in heaven.

As with any relationship, have to work at it. In pre-marriage counseling I advise couples, “Once you get married you cannot just sit on the couch and coast through. Just as you once dated, continue to date each other during your marriage, continue to get to know each other, to grow together.” You grow together by centering your marriage around the Word of God. It is the foundation of your marriage. Statistically couples who worship and pray and study God’s Word together have a higher percentage of staying together than those who don’t. But we don’t need stats to tell us that. God’s Word tells us that.

The same is true with our relationship with our God. Paul prayed for the Philippians that **“that your love may abound more and more in depth of insight and understanding.”** (vs9) Just as a couple discovers more and more about each other as they grow together, so also we learn more about our God and how he planned our salvation, how he carried out our salvation, and how he plans to maintain our faith. We want to explore the mysteries of God and try to understand more about his great love for us - because our knowledge about God creates a growth in our love toward him.

But have you ever gotten into this mindset of, “I know Jesus died for me. He rose on Easter Sunday. I’m going to heaven, that’s all I need to know.” Bible says yes, for salvation, that’s all we need to know, but… it’s a dangerous attitude to have. If we do not grow or have the desire to want to know more about our Savior’s love for us, danger is that we grow weak in our faith.

Isn’t naïve of us to think that once a week is enough to be fed with God and his Word? We eat more than once a day even, right? How much more important is the health of our soul? That we feed it with daily study of the Word of God? How many of you have a daily devotional time with our Savior? No time? Yet we have time for TV, texting, video games and searching for mindless YouTube videos. Perhaps there was a time you tried to schedule study of God’s Word, but you got bogged down because you didn’t understand it, or didn’t have a plan and you gave up and said, “It’s not worth the effort.”

But when we put our time with God’s Word as even second or third on our list of things we want to do, we’re really saying, “You know what, my relationship with God is not as important as my relationship with my friends, or my spouse, or my TV or computer.” You’ve had this happen before, you met a nice family one time, you hung out with them, then one of you moved, you send Christmas cards every December, but that’s about it. The relationship dwindles because of lack of face-to-face time. Same is with our God, when we cut off his means of communicating with us, his Word in the Bible, we divorce ourselves from God. We cut off the relationship because we don’t think it important. Then our faith is weak, we struggle through life, our trust in God’s promises is lacking, and eventually, we could lose our faith and our God forever.

But our Father in heaven does not want to see us go. Because it would mean letting us go forever. Instead, he reaches out to us today, to repent of our laziness. Instead, he desires to draws us back to himself and strengthen the relationship between us and him.

I think our situation is like a couple who came to me for counseling one time, and they confessed, “Pastor, we’ve done things in our past that we’re not proud of. We’ve hurt each other. We want to save our marriage. We don’t want to live this way anymore, but we can’t get past this guilt.” Even though we’ve been unfaithful in our relationship with our God, he has always been faithful to us.

He was faithful to us in the beginning. Paul said, “**I am confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus**.” (vs6) The good work that God began in you is your faith. Completely apart from our work, completely without our help or effort, God created faith in your heart. Through the power of his Word in Holy Baptism, he initiated the relationship with you. You believe because God created faith in your heart. Faith in your heart made you a sharer with Jesus.

In pre-marriage counseling I tell couples that once they’re married, nothing is “mine” or “his and hers.” It is “ours” because you are one in marriage as husband and wife. Through faith in Jesus he has made you sharers with him, partners, in everything he did for you. This is how close your relationship with Jesus is: when Jesus died, you died with him – all of your guilt for being lazy, for messed up priorities, for having an I-don’t-care attitude toward God’s Word – those sins and that guilt and those sinful attitudes were put to death with Christ. When Jesus rose again on Easter Sunday morning, you rose with him. You rose to a new life – a new life and new attitude that rejoices to go to God’s house, a new life that wants to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

God began a good work in you. He will carry it to completion. God wants to preserve you in your faith, because he loves you, and wants to remain close to you. Our comfort this morning is that God will do what he promised. God continues to work on our relationship with him – to keep it growing, keep it strong. He preserves that relationship through a special means – the means of his Word and Sacraments. So what are we going to do? We will grow together in God’s Word.

First of all, growing together means taking the time to sit down at Jesus’ feet together. I believe this begins in the home, not in the church. It begins with husbands and fathers, and single mothers and grandparents taking the lead for their family, making time to sit down together and listening and discussing and praying about the Word of God. The families and couples in this congregation who have started Bible study for themselves in their homes have shown me the silver and gold they have discovered as they mine the treasures of God’s Word. Members have expressed joy as they study together in Bible study here at church – Sunday morning, Wednesday morning women’s Bible study and monthly men’s Bible study – because they grow together as partners in the gospel. If you haven’t been to Bible study in a while, stay today. If you haven’t picked up your Bible at home, ask about a reading plan today – so that we might grow together.

When we grow in our understanding of Scripture, what God wants for us, we discover that as partners in the gospel we will pray for each other.

The Apostle Paul was continual in his prayer for the saints in Philippi. What’s amazing is that for as many people that Paul met in his life, the many cities and towns he worked in, he remembered these people by name. He did not have an address book or blackberry to keep them all straight. How did he remember all their names? He prayed for them by name, because he had them in his heart. Read Romans 16 today and you’ll see how Paul lists off the names of people he sends greetings to. He recognized that they were partners in Christ, and God wants us to pray for each other.

Someone asked me that one time after church as I was greeting people, “Pastor, how do remember everyone’s name?” I answered, “Because I pray for each of them, by name.” I am by no means perfect in my prayer life. I’m always seeking to grow. Someday I hope to be like the Apostle Paul in my prayer life. This is what partners in Christ do, they pray for each other.

We at Faith Lutheran make great efforts to equip you to do this. Every Sunday morning, the announcements contain the names of folks to pray for. Take it home today and pray for them. The stewardship calendar that members receive every month contains the name of members you can pray for. I don’t mean to embarrass them, but if you look Kim and Kyle Uzzell are up today. Pray for them today. Tell people that you are praying for them. Because that’s what partners in the gospel do.

A year ago (in two days from now) we dedicated this building. Some people expressed concern that when we moved into the new building we would lose the “family feel.” I don’t think that’s possible. No matter how the Holy Spirit decides to grow this congregation, it won’t happen. Not when we recognize who we are – partners in the gospel. Not when we grow together in our knowledge of Jesus. Not when we pray for each other. Because that is who we are and that’s what we do as partners in the gospel. Amen.