

## The Word Makes Us Advent Partners

† In the Gospel (vv.3-6)

† In God's grace (vv.7,8)

† In the praise and glory of God (vv.9-10)

In the name of Jesus, our Advent Savior and King, dear preparing Christians:

Can you remember an incident in dire straits when strangers proved to be exceptionally kind? For me it was the summer of 1969 when our family was headed to a family reunion in Chadron, Nebraska. The Oregon mechanic assured my dad with the 1965 VW Microbus was good to go – all the way to Nebraska and back, scrunched with two adults, seven children and full camping gear. We came up a little short. Two of the four cylinders blew out in the desert mountains fifty miles out of Buffalo, Wyoming. It took four hours for my dad and brother Chris to hitchhike into town and come back with a tow truck. We were so tired when we finally got into town. Ahead lay several days of waiting to discover that no one could work on our bus in that town. What made the wait much easier was the mechanic and his wife feeding us that first meal and helping us settle into the KOA Campground. And it didn't hurt that I found \$5.00 in the Laundromat which was mine to spend however I wanted.

During the season of Advent, we're not only preparing for Jesus' coming, we're on a trip to heaven. We could as well all be one big family in a bus with one pressing question every mile: Will we make it? God's Word brought us here. And truly **The Word Makes Us Advent Partners....**

† In the Gospel (vv.3-6)

They did not beat us in Buffalo, Wyoming. No one in our family was thrown in jail. There was no loss of blood, no chains, no earthquake throwing open prison doors. We came quietly; a few days later we left quietly. Not so for the Apostle Paul when he and his partner Silas with a young man named Timothy first came to Philippi. Things started out quietly enough. Public transportation got them across the sea by boat from Troas. They walked the ten miles from Neapolis on a good Roman road to Philippi, a Roman colony mostly made up of retired soldiers. The Jewish population was apparently so small, there was no synagogue. Paul found his fellow Jews worshiping in the next most usual spot, down by the river. Unusual kindness? A businesswoman named Lydia whose heart was moved by the Gospel made them an offer they could not refuse: *"If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house."* (Acts 16:15 NIV) How can you say, "No," to that?

For us to get out of Buffalo, Wyoming, cost us several hundred dollars to buy an old '57 Chevy station wagon from the mechanic. He was kind on the price too. And I was always impressed by how nice it was to ride in such a big quiet, car that could carry all of us and pull that Volkswagen bus up hills at more than 35 mph. But something was very different for us compared to Paul when he left Philippi. Our hosts in Wyoming were very kind, but we never heard from them again. The transaction was done on the Chevy station wagon. It pulled that bus to Nebraska and right back to the mechanic in Oregon who certified all four cylinders to last over 3,000 miles. We just had fond memories of kind hospitality.

But Paul left Philippi with **Partners**. I don't mean Silas and Timothy, nor did their other **Partners** actually come along. Paul wrote: *"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Shared faith in Jesus made them **Partners** just as **The Word Makes Us Advent Partners – In the Gospel**. Only God can make this partnership and keep it together.

## † In God's grace (vv.7,8)

It always seemed to happen at the most inopportune times, my dad running out of gas, I mean. After driving through the night in the Chevy station wagon chased by a fully loaded Volkswagen bus with no people in it, we were just a few hours away from Chadron, Nebraska. Not even that Chevy could run on an empty tank. But neither can our souls. Since fully trained mechanics can't always get it right, since all of us run out of gas now and then or find we forgot to fill up the only spare tire we carry – where do we get this perverted idea that if we try hard enough, we can get ourselves home to heaven? Mom's tears and missed reunions are not the price we pay if we fail in our Advent preparations.

Grudges would have been the natural reaction of Paul toward Philippi. It would be easy to imagine him swearing, "I'll never go back there again!" He might have even found something not to like about Lydia and the jailer at Philippi whose entire family also converted to Christ in Baptism. It seems to take far less than a physical beating to get us angry enough for years on end. Families and churches can be some of the worst places in the earth for deep set grudges that grow like weeds through a concrete driveway. Leave them long enough, and you'll have to destroy the driveway to get out the roots.

But the Lord's Apostle Paul knew the perfect solution. God's Word taught him to look at himself as a natural born enemy of God and everything good. He was always amazed that God was so kind to him when he had been a violent persecutor of God's people. For Paul, **God's grace** was very real. And that undeserved love that washed his sins away was such a flood of kindness in Christ that all our sins washed away with his. He could not help holding his fellow sinners close in heart and mind. Paul wrote: *"It 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. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."* **God's Word Makes Us Advent Partners – In the gospel, In God's grace**, and that's not all. Get this...

## † In the praise and glory of God (vv.9-10)

Would you ever expect someone who sold you a car to keep calling to see how things were going? What if they always sent you gas money and a little extra to cover any repairs? What if your insurance bill was constantly coming in the mail "Paid in full"? You would see all these as totally unexpected and undeserved gifts. No one could demand such kindness from someone else. But when **The Word Makes Us Partners – In the praise and glory of God**, things like that happen constantly.

Later on in this letter Paul will praise God for the way the Philippians kept following him around with gifts of money in order to help him spread God's Word on his missionary travels. None of the other churches did that, but the Philippians in spite of extreme poverty not only sent monetary gifts, but a member named Epaphroditus who almost died trying to make up for the help his fellow Philippians were not there to give. What can a pastor say when God's Word shows such awesome power in people's lives?

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

We made it to that family reunion just in time before everyone started leaving. Our family reunion with God and His people has a set Day when we all need to be ready. There will not be a second chance for heaven. We need more discernment to check the gas gauge on our souls to make sure we don't run out of **Gospel** power a few hours shy of the goal. We need more wisdom than the best mechanic to be sure our Advent preparation will carry us all the way through the desert mountains to the spring green pastures of **grace**. We don't need praise from men. We need praise from God that says, "You're mine. Welcome home!" This we have in Christ because **The Word Makes Us Advent Partners – In the praise and glory of God**. May we overflow in **Gospel-grace** from Jesus, our Advent King. Amen.