

## Grace and Peace to You

† **In thankful remembrance** (vv.1-3)

† **In powerful conviction** (vv.4,5a)

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of the nations and Commander of His Church, dearly redeemed believers:

Did you ever expect to see a candidate for President called by some, “the Messiah”? Separation of church and state? Candidates can believe what they want. And we treasure the freedom to vote our conscience. Our county, founded on Christian principles, keeps wringing its hands for economic answers while one candidate passed up several opportunities to stop the killing of babies who survive failed abortions. America legalized abortion, then partial birth abortion, euthanasia and infanticide. Yet some citizens see only one sin, what they call “intolerance” when Christians believe, **“Thus says the LORD.”**

We don’t want to force our religion on others. We follow our Savior’s command to **“love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”** (Luke 6:27f NIV) But secular humanists do not follow this command. So a father in Massachusetts was arrested in handcuffs for objecting to homosexual books sent home with his boys from grade school. A couple in New Mexico was fined \$6,000 for refusing to photograph a same sex wedding. A Methodist church is fighting litigation for refusing to allow a homosexual marriage on their church property. My fellow Americans, if it gets any worse, we will finally understand why Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **Grace and Peace to You**, and why it is so encouraging that God’s **Grace** comes...

† **In thankful remembrance** (vv.1-3)

**“Paul, Silas and Timothy”** – two Jews and a Gentile living in the Roman Empire where the emperor considered himself a god far above any “Messiah.” The Romans prided themselves in religious tolerance, which to them meant looking the other way when Jewish zealots attacked and beat the apostles and missionaries of Jesus Christ. They forced Paul to flee from mob violence in Thessalonica, then followed him to Berea, where the brothers again sent him away for safety. Timothy maybe missed the first violence in Thessalonica and as an unknown, could be sent back by Paul **“to strengthen and encourage”** the Thessalonians (3:2f). The Lord’s apostle was afraid these new Christians would buckle under the pressure of persecution and fall for forged letters claiming to have come from Paul.

**“I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 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? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.”** (1 Thessalonians 3:5-10 NIV)

Paul had to flee so quickly, that some of the bricks were missing in their faith foundation. Dear friends, what about us as members of this congregation? Still today, God’s Word is true: **“For [Jesus] sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”** (Romans 8:36 NIV) Satan wants to destroy your soul. How can any of us be content with worship once a week or less and not come to Bible Class for weapons of the Spirit? If food and water are necessary every day, why do we not let our Good Shepherd lead us to the rich pastures and refreshing water of His Word? How foolish for sheep to wander. How deadly for Christ’s people to despise the Means of Grace!

But, oh, to hear of your faith, to see you here worshipping the Lord together, my heart swells with joy in Jesus and with His Apostle Paul: *“We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* God’s work in you is a beauty to behold! Your faith is in Jesus as the Savior who washed your sins away, even the sinful neglect of His Word. And this faith works, works hard to clean and beautify the Lord’s house, to teach the children and to share this message of full and free forgiveness. Spiritually, “It’s a Hard Knock Life,” as the orphans sing in *Annie*. But the love God gave you in Christ, keeps pounding away on doing good here and everywhere. You refuse to give up because our Lord Jesus Christ gives you hope.

One of our WELS pastors said in a sermon: “Here’s how hope brings joy to your soul. You don’t live in the past with bitterness and regrets; you are looking forward because you have an incredible future. No matter how rough life may be right now, someday soon you’re going to be pain-free and celebrating in everlasting glory. Hope is how you face surgery or tough it out in a difficult work situation. Hope is where your heart is when your body is limping along.”<sup>1</sup>

### ✠ In powerful conviction (vv.4,5a)

How could Paul know faith, love and hope would live on in Thessalonica? How can we truly know God’s **Grace and Peace** live forever here? Look back with Paul before time and forward to eternity. He could tell God’s love had chosen them by the way they reacted to God’s Word and reflected God’s love for them. *“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”*

Paul had the **Powerful conviction** of God’s **Peace** because Jesus, the Prince of Peace, convinced Paul that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, crucified and risen as the Savior of the world. The Paul could look back on the power God showed through prophets like Elisha. Problems came up for which Elisha had powerful solutions. A poor prophet lost a borrowed ax head in the water. Elisha threw in a stick that made the iron float. (2 Kings 6:1-7) Someone put wild gourds in the stew which could have killed the company of prophets. Elisha put some flour in the pot that made it edible. (2 Kings 4:38-41) The water near Jericho was polluted. But when Elisha had them throw in some salt, it was healed along with the land. (2 Kings 2:9-22) Paul saw such miracles in his own necessities. So did one of our nurses in Africa. When she kept running out of medicine, she asked God to bless the wounds she could only wash with water. “You would be surprised,” she told a WELS pastor, “how many God healed with water.”

Must America come up with all the right solutions, or is it rather time to repent of our sins of murder, greed and covetousness? Should we not pray for God to bless our next President and Congress so that their solutions work for us all? God washes our sins away with the water of Baptism according to His promise. He does not need the help of man to prosper and bless all who trust in Him for mercy.

God’s **Peace** works **Powerful conviction**. Are you there yet? Are we as a congregation called together to manage God’s blessings in order to spread His Word? The health of a congregation is directly proportional to how many of its leaders are in Bible Class. Since God created and calls men as servant-leaders, brother, where are you? “Pastor, I just can’t do this. Maybe someone else should.” Brother, who would that be? Look at your Membership Directory and explain why we have so many vacancies. Should the other brothers and your pastor follow your reasoning and all resign because none of us work as well as we should? Or is it time to step up and serve as God enables us? And since we all lack the natural strength of good stewardship, isn’t it time for our men in particular to set a good example in Bible Class?

There is a time to be stubborn. That would be anytime and every time when someone or something or your old sinful heart wants to give up on God and His Word. We need to be more like that

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Pastor Daron Lindemann in *PREACH THE WORD* – Jan/Feb 2007, p. 2.

old mule that fell into a well. He thought everything would be fine when the master looked over the edge, but then he walked away. “What’s that noise I hear,” he asked in donkey language. “Maybe the neighbors are coming to help get me out!” But then the dirt started to fall. It was like those times at work when everyone seems to have a shovel for dumping on you. Imagine the mule’s terror being buried alive! His master had decided neither the mule nor the well were worth saving. But then he realized his problem was actually his deliverance. He kept repeating, “Shake it off and step up...,” “Shake it off and step up...,” until he finally emerged dirty, bruised and triumphant out of the well into the sunshine.

This is not just a good story. The Holy Spirit inspired King David to pray this way:

*✠ I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. (Psalm 40:1-5 NIV)*

We have more reason than ever to pray for our country and fulfill our responsibilities to vote our conscience. We have the shining glory of Jesus’ cross and the blazing truth of His empty tomb to inspire and empower us to be good stewards of our congregation with all the gifts and graces God has given. Let your **Powerful conviction** show. Rejoice **In thankful remembrance** of what God has done in the this place and what He has planned for us in eternity with Him. Yes, **Grace and Peace to You** – in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.