

Advent Testimony

- ✧ joyful prayer (vv.16-18)
- ✧ faithful prophecy (vv.19-22)
- ✧ sanctified peace (vv.23,24)

In the name of Christ Jesus our Savior who has come and is coming again, dearly redeemed:

This just in, shared by a dear daughter: “LCMS Mission Field: USA – According to the latest Gallup poll, only one group of Americans saw an increase in their mental health in 2020...” Care to venture a guess? “Weekly churchgoers. In a nation that is hurting and grieving, there has never been a more crucial time to invite others to celebrate the advent and birth of Christ. And to begin new missions as we go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere in Mission Field: USA.” In short, testify!

But what do you do when God seems to be asking more than you can give? These last verses of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians record one imperative after another. Really Paul? **“Rejoice always”** – Did you ever get stuck in one place so you couldn’t go out? **“Pray without ceasing”** – Don’t you realize how fast paced our world is now? **“Give thanks”** – I get that, but **“in everything”**? Paul the Apostle of action, some say spent more time in prison than modern felons. So yes, he knew what it meant to be confined. Busy? **“Surely, brothers, you remember our labor and hardship! We worked night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you, while we preached the gospel of God to you.”** (1 Thessalonians 2:9 EHV¹) Paul was constantly giving thanks – for trials and tribulations, beatings, imprisonment, for fellow Christians – troublesome and peaceful. “Pastor, I’m not like Paul or Jesus.” Exactly! Me either. Let’s repent together. God wants to create our eager **Advent Testimony**.

✧ joyful prayer (vv.16-18)

If you’re stuck at home, there’s a problem among others. Even if you’re working or studying, you finally need time to relax and let your mind rest. Not being able to go out or hang with friends can throw you into the mud fight of American media or leave you drowning in the cesspool of Hollywood. For the most part screen time can really rob you of joy and make it harder than ever to pray or give thanks.

Yet the Lord’s holy writer Paul says, **“This is God’s will for you....”** If that was the end of the sentence, you’d have to throw up your hands, “I give up!” But wait. Let the Holy Spirit finish. **“This is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** There’s the key. Jesus is the **Christ**, the long promised deliverer who stands by you and lives in you because God put His Name on you in your baptism. And this Christ is **Jesus** who came the first time to save us from our sins and is coming again to take us to heaven.

One reason to really give thanks in **joyful prayer** is because God’s people are pushing back. In recent months there have been docudramas about Christian leaders like Martin Luther, great preachers like Charles Surgeon, missionaries and converts like C. S. Lewis. While **“the nations exhaust themselves for nothing”** (Habakkuk 2:13) spending millions to churn out pictures you can’t unsee that leave you feeling dirty inside, Christian film makers are fighting back with wholesome films. Funny how leaving out the filthy language, sex and violence means you actually have to use your imagination to write a story. Sometimes these can be cheesy, it’s true. But when I see the grace of God applied to family problems, healing wounded hearts and homes, pouring grace into racial tensions, I thank the Lord again for His Word of life in Christ Jesus. I also see how much we Christians need to learn God’s Word better.

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

☆ faithful prophecy (vv.19-22)

To always “*pray without ceasing,*” does that mean you sometimes fall asleep while you’re praying? And how do you not run out of things to say? How do you know God is pleased with your prayers? Maybe some of us have real jobs where we can’t be on our knees all the time. And how do you fold your hands and close your eyes while driving? Folks honestly want to know, need to know.

Hear again the Holy Spirit’s help through Paul: “*Do not extinguish the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt. But test everything. Hold on to the good. Keep away from every kind of evil.*” Prayer is our side of a conversation God started, even giving us a model, our Lord’s Prayer. When you want to pray, it’s because the dear Holy Spirit has lit the fire of faith in your heart. Don’t extinguish that by wandering away. Stay close to the fire of God’s Word where *prophecies* or preaching can be tested. Does God say it in writing – the Holy Scriptures of the Bible? Everything else is only human opinion. When you find *the good*, hold onto it. When you’re confronted with *evil* pretending to be good, *keep away* as you would from a wolf in sheep’s clothing or a roaring lion looking to devour you.

This can be an awesome time to grow in your faith. Could that be why the weekly churchgoers are increasing in mental health? We really feel the need to pay attention now, don’t we? More than ever I thank the Lord that God’s Word is my job because I love seeing children’s eyes light up in school chapel hearing the name of Jesus. I love them teaching me a song about Jesus coming. Seeing joy and peace shining from your eyes right past your mask. The awesome peace that we all receive in Christ’s Holy Supper. I pray eagerly for more folks to seek **faithful prophecy**, God’s Word in Bible Information Class. Godless politicians brag about never letting a good crisis go to waste. How much more shouldn’t God’s own people be busy “*redeeming the time because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:16 KJV)? We need...

☆ sanctified peace (vv.23,24)

Have you noticed how drama is over 95% problem with barely any time left for peace and happiness in the end? Christian families may think they’re at peace, but is it only because they’re not talking? Like couples who rarely have an honest discussion about deep seated hurts? One professor called that “the peace of the graveyard.” No noise, peaceful, but not the **sanctified peace** of Christ our coming King. Christian films fumble here too. Appreciate their efforts, but here’s where they need you.

One fine film shows four police officers and a Hispanic friend signing a resolution to be faithful fathers to their families and husbands to their wives. All good, right? Except one officer is stealing drugs from evidence, forcing one of the four to turn him in. In prison super sorry, he asks his former partner for forgiveness. “I forgive you,” he answers. Last scene shows him crying on the floor of his cell – alone. What’s wrong with this picture? Such cold despair needs the **sanctified peace** which you can give.

Now listen to one sentence from the December 2020 issue of *Forward in Christ*. Brandee writes, “I really enjoyed my time in jail...” Whoa! Here’s the rest of her statement: “I really enjoyed my time in jail getting to know the ladies, Joanne, Becky, and April, who’d visit and share God’s Word.” Read “Confessions of Faith,” p. 7ff. God gave her **sanctified peace** through jail ministry volunteers.

“*May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*” The Good News that your sins are forgiven can actually heal your *body*. (Isaiah 53) Your *soul* is the eternal *you* that God wants to bring home to heaven first, then reunite with your glorified body on J-Day – Jesus’ Day / Judgment Day – when Christ comes to take you home to heaven. Inmates are sending tests that need correcting, writing letters that need to be answered. **Body, soul and spirit** – deep down inside where drugs and therapy cannot reach. So grateful Jesus died even for me. So comforting to know I am forgiven by God. But I want God’s **sanctified peace** for my nearest and dearest. God **calls you** and God **is faithful** and God **will do it** through His Word. Have you found the sermon archive at *New Life Shoreview*? What are you waiting for? Another pandemic? It’s Advent. Testify! Amen.

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You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126