

**NOVEMBER 29, 2020; ADVENT 1; SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON**

**(50% seating capacity)**

**Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

**PRELUDE:** Ruth Antal (Osthus Singers)

**HYMN #1 “Lift up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates” 9 am:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FIRST ADVENT CANDLE READING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER**

**CHILDREN’S SERMON:** “What is in this box?”...Isaiah 64:3 *you did awesome things that we did not expect*

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON:** *Isaiah 64:1-9 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! 2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! 3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. 4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. 5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? 6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. 7 No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. 8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9 Do not be angry beyond measure, O LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people.*

**GOSPEL LESSON:** *Mark 13:24-37 "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." 26 "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. 28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. 32 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

**PASTOR:** Here ends the reading of God’s Word.

**CONGREGATION SINGS:** God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He

shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

**GLORIA PATRI:** *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING**

**PRAISE SONGS:** *“Give Thanks” & “Jesus, Name above all Names”*

### **SERMON TITLE: “BLAMELESS: A CALL TO REPENTANCE” I Corinthians 1:3-9; Pastor Tom Olson; November 29, 2020**

*Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

**MISSING:** Something is missing. Have you noticed one thing that is different in this pandemic from other natural disasters we have had in the past? Governors are **not** asking for **prayer**...just telling us to follow “the science.” There are even signs in people’s yards saying how they “believe in” science. I am all for good research based upon the “scientific method” and I am in no way asking anyone to trust in superstition and untested cures. But in the “not so distant past” and certainly for the first two hundred years of America, our leaders and scholars, for the most part, had no problem reverently bowing their heads in sincere repentance and prayer for help from heaven.

**REMNANT:** It is not totally gone, President Trump asks for prayer, but I have not heard much from our governor in Minnesota and in Wisconsin on that regard. I did an internet search for “Governor Walz asks for prayer” and little to nothing came up. I did the same for Governor Noem of South Dakota and President Trump and there were dozens of requests for prayer from both. Maybe I just missed it...but I am afraid I didn’t. **We have a new type of leader in our land**...secular leaders that want to leave God out of the equation. But my Bible tells me that **pestilence** is a **judgement** for sin and the **WAY OUT IS REPENTANCE**.

**ADVENT:** Just like Lent is the season of repentance in preparation for the Resurrection, so also, Advent is the season of repentance and preparation for the Advent of our Savior in Bethlehem and his second coming on the Mount of Olives. We can’t do much to change our governor, but as **2 Chronicles 7:14** reminds us, repentance doesn’t begin with political leaders, **it begins in the house of God**. “...*if my people*...” In humility we heed the call to be “blameless” which is not sinless but it is a humble state of repentance which is probably the only way to beat the pestilences we have brought upon ourselves.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 is our text. I have borrowed the sermon outline from a great book written by a Chinese Christian named Watchman Nee. The outline is SIT, WALK, STAND.

#### **I. SIT: A BLAMELESS POSITION BY GRACE**

*I Corinthians 1:3-4 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.*

**GRACE:** As we desire to prepare our hearts for Christmas and the second coming of Christ, we are in need of the grace of God and new life in Christ. Our repentance is not trying hard in our own strength to stop sinning. Repentance is a “change of mind” that admits I am helpless to save myself. Paul says here that his power of

God is “given you in Christ Jesus.” Grace to be forgiven flows from Christ. Grace to let go of sin and be a mature Christian also comes from Christ.

**CLEANING:** We have been busy these days cleaning our house to prepare for guests at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We want our home to be clean for them, especially the guest room and bathrooms. But house cleaning is only possible if you have a house and if you have the health and ability to clean it. I have a dear friend who is a few years older than I am. His wife recently retired from a long career with her local police department. I am sure she was looking forward to lots of entertaining and activities that she didn’t have time for in the past decades. But a few days ago, this dear woman had a bad stroke and she lies paralyzed and unable to speak at United Hospital in St. Paul.

**HELPLESS:** She would love to clean her house and entertain but she can’t even try. She is helpless. She is dependent upon others to keep her alive. She has great doctors and a dedicated husband. They are trying so hard to save her and see her come back to a meaningful life. Nada Anderson is in the same process after her stroke. She is dependent upon Pastor Andy to do much of her care for her.

**DEPENDENT:** We are also dependent upon God for salvation and victory over sin. He is with us, just like the faithful husbands of these women who had strokes. He wants to save us and help us. All we have to do is receive His grace and look to Him!

*Hebrews 12:1&2 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 **FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross...**”*

**BELIEVE:** If you want spiritual power and victory in your life, the first step is to believe in Jesus our Savior. Won’t you invite Him into your heart today? Sit with Him in heaven. Trust Him to forgive you. Trust Him to cleanse you. Put your full weight on Him like you would a chair. He will carry you. **SIT WITH CHRIST.**

## **II. WALK: THE PROVISION OF EVERY SPIRITUAL NEED**

*1 Corinthians 1:5-7 For in him you have been enriched in every way-in all your speaking and in all your knowledge- 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*

**ENOUGH:** One thing that most of us can say as we look at our lives is this: “God provides me with everything I need...not everything I want (thankfully)...but everything I NEED!” I have had food, clothing, home, family, work, material goods, friends, trustworthy neighbors, strength in hard times and so much more. God has given us every **SPIRITUAL BLESSING** in Christ...salvation, the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, good churches, pastoral care, wisdom, insight, understanding, guidance, ministries and so much more. Most of us have what we need in abundance.

**WAITING:** There is only one thing we don’t have. It is the best gift of all. That is the second coming of Christ and where He wipes out evil and sets up an eternal kingdom. Notice here that Paul says that we have everything we need as we “*eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*” When we are in the presence of Christ in His kingdom, we will finally have the perfect provision...no more sin, sickness, pain, sorrow or death. Our frail bodies will be replaced with incorruptible, perfect bodies. Our failing minds will be replaced with the “mind of Christ.”

***I Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”***

BACKPACKING: I like to watch YouTube videos about living in off the grid cabins and tiny houses. On one episode that home owner described how to pack for long term backpacking. Every item was carefully chosen because of necessity and maintaining minimal weight. The presenter told us that she used to carry 75 pounds of gear and supplies but has reduced it down to 35 pounds. That 35 pounds is all she needs to live for extended periods of time in the wilderness. She doesn't carry much, but she has everything she needs to make it through the journey with minimal load to carry. A minimal load makes for a better trip!

MINIMALIST: We may want more talents, more possessions, more opportunities...but sometimes the best way to enjoy this life God has given us is with less than what we want. All that we need has been provided and always will be. One day as we part from this life and leave all material things behind, even our bodies. We will find out that Jesus is truly the one and only thing we need. And we have Him and He has promised never to leave us.

### **III. STAND: HOLY LIVING THROUGH THE POWER OF GOD**

***I Corinthians 1:8&9 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.***

What is the end result of Jesus Christ dwelling in your heart by faith? It is heaven sent power to have victory over sin, death and the power of the devil. Notice the **KEY PHRASES** here:

**KEY PHRASE #1: HE WILL KEEP YOU STRONG**-Sometimes we don't know how we are going to overcome the sin that is ruining our lives. The answer is in the pronoun "HE." That is the Lord Jesus Christ. The same one who purchased the forgiveness of our sins on the cross, is the same one who has the power to root that sin out of our lives and keep it away. Stop trying to fix yourself and others. You can't do it. *People live in emotional exhaustion trying to fix everybody around them.* It can't be done. We don't even have the power to fix ourselves. But Christ does. **We would all have better marriages and families if the time we spent trying to fix each other was spent praying for each other.** When we stop fighting in our strength and collapse into the arms of Christ and say, "I can't do it," then and only then does the power of God come into our life and home to bring about real victory over evil. Repentance is choosing to collapse into the arms of the Savior, looking into his loving face and saying, "I need your help." His reply will be, ***"I have been waiting for you to ask!"***

**KEY PHRASE #2: YOU WILL BE BLAMELESS**-The end result of Christ in our lives is that we will be blameless. When we are clothed with the garments of salvation, God sees us as if we have no sin. We are declared to be blameless. If this is real faith then the Holy Spirit will enter our lives and make our blameless standing become an outward reality...that is called sanctification. It is like our old barn. We bought a tumbling down old barn in 1994. Once we paid for it, the old wreck was ours. We have spent considerable time and money in the past twenty-four years fixing it up. Each year it gets better! Christ purchased our sinful souls on the cross, he took possession of our lives when faith came into our hearts and he is using His Word and Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ...a process that will be completed at death in heaven when we are perfectly transformed by seeing Him face to face.

**KEY PHRASE #3: GOD...IS FAITHFUL**-God doesn't give up on His children. ***Philippians 1:6 ...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*** God is patient.

- He mostly uses blessings to bring us into repentance. *Romans 2:4 ...do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*
- He uses His Word. *Isaiah 55:10-11 "My Word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*
- He uses trials and testing. *Romans 5:3&4 "...suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope."* God is working every day to make you and me into blameless, Spirit-filled people...useful for His highest purposes and ready for His return.

So SIT, WALK AND STAND

SIT confidently in the grace of forgiveness through the innocent blood of Jesus.

WALK using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to lead a holy life and

STAND on the promises of God's Word to resist the attacks of the evil one.

This is good preparation for Christmas and the best way to heal America of the physical and spiritual "virus of sin."

*Now may the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen*

**SOLO: Pastor Mark & Ruth Antal; 9 AM:** \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER:** *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

**BENEDICTION:** The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

**HYMN #5 "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" 9 am Vagle Brothers "Doxology" #19**

**POSTLUDE:** Ruth Antal