

**DECEMBER 13, 2020; ADVENT 3; SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON**

**(50% seating capacity for COVID rules)**

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

**PRELUDE:** Rebekah Olson (Team Singers)

**HYMN #8 “Come, Thou Savior of Our Race” 9 am:** \_\_\_\_\_

*You may find it interesting to note that our opening hymn words were written by Aurelius Ambrose in about 370 AD (1,650 years ago) and the tune was written by Martin Luther in about 1520 AD (500 years ago).*

**THIRD ADVENT CANDLE READING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHILDREN’S SERMON:** “New Clothes for Christmas” Isaiah 61:10 “...*For he has clothed me with garments of salvation...*”

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON:** *Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11*

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion--to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. 4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.*

*8 "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. 9 Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed." 10 I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.*

**GOSPEL LESSON:** *John 1:6-8, 19-28*

*6 There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. 19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" 24 Now some Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

**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: Krista chooses one or two praise songs with "team" singing.**

#### **SERMON TITLE: "KEPT FOR CHRIST"**

**I Thessalonians 5:16-24; Pastor Tom Olson; December 13, 2020**

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

One of the most important skills that the human race has treasured over the past thousands of years is this: The ability to preserve food. The shelf life of a vegetable or piece of newly butchered meat is very short without preservation. Preserving food is very important in bush Alaska where store bought food is too expensive. Our summers in Alaska were focused upon preserving salmon, caribou, moose, berries and what vegetables we could grow. Electricity for freezer space was very expensive so we also used canning, drying, smoking and salting as means of preservation. Bags of rock salt were inexpensive and we would put layers of salt and salmon in five-gallon buckets and in the winter, we would soak the salt out of the fish over night and then use it the next day for food to eat. One of my favorite ways to preserve meat is pickling it...and I love "Suloonuk" Pickled Salmon! We had a great recipe.

Today in our Epistle text tells us the recipe that God uses to keep us spiritually alive and healthy until the day that Jesus comes for us. **Verses 23 & 24: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it."** God SANCTIFIES us, he cleans us up and God KEEPS us, he preserves us in a world that is bent on drawing us away from Him. Notice the simple steps that we are to take in cooperating with this process and insuring the most rewarding and fruitful Christian life along the way.

Let's look at it today as if it would be a RECIPE FOR PRESERVING OUR SOULS:

#### **I. INGREDIENT 1: JOY Verse 16: *Be joyful always***

**The PRIMARY reason for our lack of spiritual strength is lack of joy.** A Christian who is not joyful, is one who is extremely vulnerable to the attacks of the devil. David pleads with God to "restore unto him the joy of salvation." (Psalm 51:12) A joyful Christian is a strong Christian who can easily overcome the

attacks of the evil one. *Nehemiah 8:10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH."* A first priority for any believe is to eliminate anything in our lives that steals our joy...stay away from people who throw cold water on your joy. Then we need to implement in our lives practices that increase our joy. What might they be? One is continually reminding ourselves of the promises of God. Another is to spend time with people who are filled with the joy of the Lord and let it spread to you.

## **II. INGREDIENT 2: PRAYER Verse 17: *pray continually***

One of the best books about prayer I have ever come across is "Conversational Prayer" by Rosalind Rinker. You can buy them on line used for about \$4.00. It is a good investment. But you don't need to read the book. I can teach it to you in one minute. Simply talk to God about anything and everything at all times. It can be out loud or just in your spirit and mind.

If you remember old science fiction movies, people would have an invisible "force field" around their person or vehicle that was impenetrable. That is what conversational prayer is. It is a "force field" around us that the evil one cannot penetrate. When we are talking with God, the devil and our sinful flesh cannot put evil thoughts into our minds! Continual, conversational prayer will keep us in a constant state of victory over the enemy of our souls.

## **III. INGREDIENT 3: THANKFULNESS Verse 18: *give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

If prayer is our force field than I would like to call THANKFULNESS an OFFENSIVE WEAPON. If we want to open up the door of our life to the work of Satan, all we have to do is grumble and complain. That is why the Word of God makes such a clear point in *Philippians 2:14 "Do everything without complaining or arguing."* I have noticed that various people who have things go wrong for them time and again have one thing in common...THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO ARGUE AND COMPLAIN. It seems like nothing will curse our life more than complaining. But people who tend to have life go exceptionally well for them also have one thing in common...THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE THANKFUL.

We have an elderly person in our congregation who has a great blessing that hangs over her life. She looks good, her home is filled with peace, beauty, order and joy. Her family members adore her. And in spite of the normal effects of old age, she just goes from one good day to the next. And when I call her, in spite of lockdowns in her assisted living building, she just gives me a long recitation off everything that she appreciates so much and she NEVER COMPLAINS about anything. Some of you know who I mean, don't you? She is \_\_\_\_\_\_. I always feel clean, pure, energized and inspired when I visit with her. She doesn't even realize it...that her thankful spirit conquers the dark powers of evil wherever she goes. I am blessed to know her and miss visiting her so very much.

## **IV. INGREDIENT 4: FIRE Verse 19: *Do not put out the Spirit's fire;***

We need to be SPIRIT-FILLED. The Holy Spirit is alive and well on planet earth and God want His children to not merely POSSESS the Holy Spirit, but He wants us to be FILLED with the Holy Spirit...filled to overflowing. How do you get the fulness of the Holy Spirit?

Two steps:

- FIRST ASK...*Luke 11:13 "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*
- SECOND ADD FUEL TO THE FIRE...*2 Timothy 1:6&7 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

We burn wood in a stove at our house. When the fire dies down, we stir it up and in moments the black coals are glowing red hot. Then we add more fuel to the fire. When we stir up the spiritual gifts God has given us and use them, the Spirit will flow through us like a life-giving river. When I neglect to use my tools in my shop, they get rusty, but when I use them, they work better and better. I once brought my 1960 3 HP Johnson boat motor to the repair shop and asked the repair man what was wrong with it. His answer stunned me when he said, "You don't use it enough. The more you use it the better it will work, the less you use it, the poorer it will work!" Use your gifts.

#### **V. INGREDIENT 5: WORD Verse 20: do not treat prophecies with contempt.**

In the Scriptures, we have "the prophetic Word made more sure." (2 Peter 1:19)

- Isaiah 55:11-the "Word does not return empty."
- Luke 8:11-the Word is "good seed."
- Hebrews 4:12-the Word is "living and active."
- 2 Timothy 3:16It is "inspired by God and profitable..."

There is no question that preaching, teaching and reading the Word of God is like food for our hungry souls. To neglect the Word is to starve our souls.

#### **VI. INGREDIENT 6: EDIFICATION**

*Verse 21: Test everything. Hold on to the good.*

It is soon the time of year we start to think about "spring cleaning." After January 1<sup>st</sup> I am ready to clean house! I have had some big bonfires in January over the years. One person said that everything we own should either be BEAUTIFUL or USEFUL. All else should go. This is true for our lives as well. We need to periodically test everything in our lives. Good here is a strong word which really implies THE BEST. There are sayings about "good, better and best." But they really use the term "good" incorrectly. They tell imply that good is enemy of the best. But really, we should say "adequate is the enemy of good" if we use the Biblical definition of good. And that good is the opposite of evil. Hold on to what is good and be willing to let everything else go.

Ultimately holding on to the good is holding on to God...for God alone is all we can bring into eternity after we die. What do you have in your life that needs to be tested? ...a relationship, ...a possession, ...a use of time? Test it and then keep it or let it go. If it edifies, builds you and others up, keep it. If it wears and tears you down, let it go, as a general rule at least.

#### **VII. INGREDIENT 7: PURITY Verse 22: Avoid every kind of evil.**

What is the best way to avoid evil? ...evil people, ...evil places, ...evil activities? The best way is to stay busy with the things that are good. The idle mind is the devil's playground. Stay pure by staying busy. Martin Luther urged Christians to stay active until they were tired and then quickly go to bed and to sleep

without idle time. People with too much time on their hands often end up in trouble. Avoid evil...you will never regret it.

I think that this RECIPE that keeps us spiritually alive and happy can be summarized by a poem that I love to read at least every other year in church. In 1954 it was written and set to music by an Anglican Clergyman and his sister.

### ***We'll Dress the House***

*We'll dress the house with holly bright and sprigs of mistletoe  
We'll trim the Christmas tree tonight and set the lights aglow  
We'll wrap our gifts with ribbons gay and give them out on Christmas Day  
By everything we do and say, our gladness we will show*

*We'll dress the table daintily, our finest treasures use  
That all a-sparkle it may be and bright with lovely hews  
Then for the feasting we'll prepare a kitchen full of wondrous fare  
That each from all the dishes rare, his fav'rite one may choose*

*And ye who would the Christ child greet, your heart also adorn  
That it may be a dwelling meet for Him who now is born  
Let all unlovely things give place to souls bedecked with heavenly grace,  
That ye may view His holy face with joy on Christmas morn*

---Alfred Burt & Wihla Hutson, 1954

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

### **HYMN #34 "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice"**

**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

**DOXOLOGY:** *"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow..."* 9 am Vagle Brothers "Doxology" #19

**POSTLUDE:** Rebekah Olson