**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

Rejoice always, **17**  pray without ceasing, **18**  give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **19**  Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not despise prophecies, **21** but test everything; hold fast what is good. **22** Abstain from every form of evil. **23** Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **24**  He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

**“True Joy God Gives”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The pink candle on the Advent wreath stands out on this third Sunday in Advent. During a season of remorse over the darkness covering a sinful world, there is a light of joy in our midst. Christmas is not drawing away, but actually coming closer to us. Advent focusing on repentance is not for the sake of repenting, as if we could ever confess our sin enough. Instead, the call to repent is to show what is to be our joyful turning to Christ. This is what John the baptizer came to do, “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through Christ.”

In a time of the year when people do so much to make our celebrations joyful, a question arises that demands an answer. Is the merriment of Christmas what we make of it or is there something about Christmas that already makes it merry? Of course, we find the answer with God in a manger where there were no wrapped presents, a big family gathering, plenty of festive foods, or a glorious tree. The value of it all, the value of Christmas is Christ being born of the Virgin Mary. This is the glory that comes again not by the Church but from Christ on the Last Day. Those concerned over Christian living can easily miss the true value of what God seeks to see, which is for all to have faith alone in His Son. What joy is there when the light of Christ comes!

1. **The Will of God is for good works to adorn our lives.** St. Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians stating, “…this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
2. **With the light of Christ, we have joy to God.**

* Rejoice always.
* Joy as a product of man fades, but joy from God is an enduring hope by the Gospel.
* Joy is a state of mind more than a feeling. (David and Goliath, Daniel and Lion’s den)
* BUT joy is not so easy, especially when one problem after another rain down on life. (war of attrition)
* Pray continually.
* If conversation during the holidays is important how much more is it with God!
* St. Luke Notes, “Jesus told them a parable (of the persistent widow) to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (18:1)
* But are we expecting an answer? Are troubles leaving me to pray last or even not at all?
* Give thanks in everything.
* In wisdom king Solomon said, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end…” (Lam 3:22)
* There is even gratefulness in hardship for Christ said, “Go and tell John what you hear and see… And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Matt 11:4-6)
* But how quickly is thankfulness missed in my good times? How hard is to give than in times when you only see suffering and loss?

1. **With the light of Christ, we have joy to the world.**

* Do not quench the Spirit.
* There is a light burning in the darkness set apart by God’s Word.
* The Spirit cannot joyfully work while secular substitutes stand in the way.
* But even if God comforts by His Word, there is much to face day to day.
* Do not despise prophecies.
* Rather than push God out of the picture test it all with His Word.
* What God speaks is good even if it is at odds with the world or our ways.
* But our attention turns to cheap answers for what works or a band aid for the moment.
* Do avoid every form of evil.
* This is false teaching that removes the Gospel or a life bound to seductions of sin.
* To avoid evil means “keeping free” from the things that make us captive to the Devil.
* But why does evil seem to get the upper hand? Why is temptation so tempting?

We know that for all the joy we are to have as Christians only Christ keeps joy alive and well with us**.**

1. **The Will of God is for His good work to save our lives.** St. Paul ends his letter of Thessalonians by turning to the light saying, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely…”
2. **Christ is the light of joy delivering us from all our sins.**

* The world cannot give such peace for it belongs to God who was born of the Virgin Mary.
* This is the God of grace having gone to the deepest darkness of the cross.
* The Lord causes “righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations” by the work of His Son.
* Forgiveness is complete and perfect not on how hard you work or joyful you may be, but the highest gift God brings to those in darkness.

1. **Christ is the light of God’s faithfulness that brings the joy of faith into our hearts.**

* Rather than shift blame, turn to see God has kept you blameless by His holy Word and Sacrament.
* Rather than try to payback a debt you never can pay, Jesus paid the price and poured out faithfulness for you by baptism.
* God continues to work faith by His Spirit us so we “may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.”
* The Word and Sacraments are how God remains faithful to do what He promises.

**What joy is there when the light of Christ comes!** He makes Christmas merry and does the same with our lives for what we are and what we do. Let good works adorn our lives for God’s Will is to save by grace alone in His Son. Amen. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 1:24-25).