

**Pastor Daniel Iwinski**  
12/6/2009  
Second Sunday in Advent

**St. Paul's (WELS) Moline, IL**  
2:49  
Philippians 1:3-11

### **Be A Partner in the Gospel**

- I. Grow in the knowledge of God.*
- II. Discern what is best.*
- III. Be filled with the fruit of righteousness.*

One of the great challenges of ministry today is stepping into the pulpit and having people encounter the present reality of God's grace and His call to a faith filled life here and now.

The goal of the pastor is to take you the hearer to God's Word. What this means is that Sunday after Sunday, time after time we re-enter the world of the Bible. We speak of peoples, and customs, and goings on of antiquity. Occasionally we may even need to be reminded that the Bible records actual history and not some mythical past. Just as the faithful pastor is called to take the hearer to Christ and to what He has already accomplished for us in our past the faithful pastor is called to take you the hearer to what lies ahead in your future too.

Looking back to what God has done and looking ahead to what God has promised and guaranteed is the essence of Advent which celebrates Christ's first and second comings. As such you may think the last thing we are going to focus on today is the here and now. Not so. Today we listen to Saint Paul and his words today declare to us why Christ in our past and Christ Who will come has everything to do with today. Looking back and looking forward to not distract us from today but transform it!

Saint Paul looks back in his relationship with the Christians at Philippi when he writes: **"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."** (verses 3-6). Paul recognizes that it was God who began a good work in them. God is the author of faith and Christ Jesus in His grace rose up Christians in that city.

Paul goes so far as to call the Christians in this city partners in the gospel. He did this for good reason. Philippi was a Greek city and the people were well to do. Philippi had gold and silver mines outside of the city and it made the local inhabitants wealthy. We first encounter this city in Acts 16 when Saint Paul enters the city so that he may preach the Gospel. Paul was on his second missionary journey. The Christian church at Philippi was the first Christian church in all of Europe. It was there that Paul met a woman

named Lydia who dealt in "purple cloth." Purple was the hardest color to dye fabric in the ancient world and it is Luke's (the author of the book of Acts) subtle way of indicating wealth.

Philippi was known for a school of medicine and there is an interesting note about the book of Acts in that Luke the author uses "we" language up to the point of the workings in Philippi; after this it turns to a third person narrative. Tradition states that Saint Paul left Luke behind at Philippi to be the church's pastor. Tradition states that Luke was the pastor of the Philippian church for six years.

There is another special place in St. Paul's heart for the Philippians. While Paul was journeying and preaching the message of Christ, it was the Philippians who supported Paul financially out of their wealth. Paul acknowledges the Philippian's generosity, especially when he was ministering in Thessalonica and at Corinth. They were truly partners in the gospel with Paul and for that he was tremendously joyful and grateful.

All of these things however, as good as they were, were secondary to the fact that the Philippian Christians shared the same simple faith as Paul. This faith is what made them united to each other and to Christ. This faith was the basis of their partnership together in the Gospel.

This is exactly what Jesus has done with all of us today. Jesus makes us partners with the Gospel in His kingdom. Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples: **"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last."** (John 15:15-16). Amazing, Jesus says that everything we need to know for salvation is what He taught. Jesus does not call us servants or slaves or anything else but He does call us friends. This same Jesus is the one who promised to be with us until the very end of the age (Matthew 28:19) that we may carry out all He desires in the world.

Everything for salvation is ours and we are to give it freely to the world. This is what it means to be a partner in the gospel. Jesus said: **"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."** (Matthew 10:27). Freely we have received and freely we can give.

Today we are reminded that God has done great things in our past for the very reason that we can live a special kind of life today--right now. God's work in this world is finished regarding earning our salvation. Christ died once and in His death the sins of the world has been paid for. Christ however is far from being done in working in this world. Today God is taking that message of salvation to everyone. How is He doing it? He is doing it through His church; He is doing it through us! We are truly working towards

a goal: brining into the church as many as we can. Paul knew this and so did the Philippian church.

It is for this reason that Paul having looked back at his relationship with the Philippians now talks about--actually prays about--their future. Paul writes: **“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.”** (verses 9-11).

The first thing that Paul prays for for the Philippians is that they can grow in knowledge and insight. Paul also wrote that **“speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”** (Ephesians 4:15). The faith that we share is more than just facts and figures. This is what I tell my confirmation students day one. You can have all the right facts and information and still be spiritual immature and disconnected from God.

The kind of knowledge that we are to grow into is wisdom. Wisdom is knowing the right thing and putting it to practical, godly use. Wisdom is godly knowledge in action! When we are wise in the Lord we are able to change accordingly. This is why Paul makes his second prayer request. Why are the Philippians to grow in their knowledge? **“So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ.”**

What does Paul and God mean by this? Most essentially it means that as Christians we are people of the Spirit, we have been set free. We are fundamentally unlike other religions and this is what makes us so powerful. Think about this. Today Islam attempts to take today's world back to the past, ideally to what things were like when Islam started. Islam is a religion of law and customs: dress this way, do this, do not do that. You must! You have to! The list goes on and on. Today in parts of Europe there are great debates on how to handle Islam in the nations of England, France and others. Why? Because when you have a sizable Muslim population they want to change all of the local customs and even laws to suit their own religious cultural background.

Much can be said about Judaism too. In Judaism everything you do is governed by the law--from what you eat and what you wear to everything else. It was for this reason that when the Christian church started so many former Jews had so many struggles with the freedom Christ brought. So many wanted to keep customs of eating certain foods and worshipping on a certain day of the week that they were actually abandoning Christ. It was hard for them to learn how free Christ had made them.

Today in Jesus we are all free. The Christian church is characterized by faith in Christ Jesus and love towards God and one another. These are

supreme. This is why the Christian church can go into any culture, any society any situation and flourish. It is also why the church must be able to discern what is best.

Discernment is taking your freedom and using it in the best possible way for others. Today the question before us as a congregation is not ‘how do we keep things the way we always have done?’ but rather ‘what does the world need from us today?’ What do our neighbors need? What do our children need? What do our families with children need? What do our marriages need?

The world around us has changed. We change too: not in our theology not in our faith but in how we talk to the world and to each other. We change where we put our time and our energies.

Not all that long ago the public media and our culture was at least neutral in many ways towards the Bible and our faith. Today this has changed. Are you prepared to know your Bible and the reason why you have faith so you can encourage the young people of our congregation and society? This is the kind of fruit God asks us to bear. Not all that long ago most families stayed together and most children had a father and a mother. Today much of this has changed. Are you prepared to be there for someone who needs a role model or an advisor--a spiritual mentor? If so then you are being fruitful as God desires. Today as people hear so many different messages of the world and as some people are just coming to faith and entering the church are you prepared to welcome them and help them feel at home? If so then you are bearing the fruit of Christ and carrying out His will.

The world needs us. The world needs to know what has already happened: God has reconciled the world to himself not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:19). The world needs Christmas because the world needs a Savior and that is exactly Whom we have! The world needs a future too. The world needs the hope that this is really with a purpose and we as a world are really heading towards something. The world needs the future that is guaranteed to us. How do we give them these great gifts of Advent? We give them through our wisdom--knowing God and putting our relationship with God to use every day. We give it to the world by doing the right and wise thing that draws them to God. And we do it simply by loving in the name of Christ. Today all this is ours and today this is what we can give. Amen.