



THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 9, 2012

'Be Fruitful in the Knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ!'

Sermon Text: Second Peter 1:2-9

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

Dear Friends called to glory and excellence of virtue through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Are you prepared for Christmas? Is your heart and soul truly prepared?

Or are you like the house that is brightly lit and expensively decorated for the Christmas holiday season on the outside, but dark and void of Christ and His precious Word of Peace on the inside?

Too often, in the fast paced and materialistic lives we lead today, even we who profess to be Christians can become complacent and let the focus of our lives drift away from Christ and why He first came to this earth.

We, too, are often become like the disciples who, when told by Jesus to watch and pray, fell asleep in the garden.

Yes, the devil loves to keep us so busy with the things of this world, doesn't he?

Especially this time of the year, we can become so wrapped up in decorating our homes, holiday baking, maybe watching "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer" or some other such television programming, ...and let's not forget shopping for Christmas presents... Oh, the shopping for presents! How some of us *do* love to shop!

We too often ‘conveniently’ forget that we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but the righteous wrath of God on account of our many sins, don’t we?

Our Old Adam – that old man of sin that yet clings to our flesh – likes to seduce us. And how often is it that we don’t through weakness and complacency give in to the seduction? And so we find we have a tendency to set aside – to place on the back burner of our lives as it were – the need for daily contrition and repentance, acting as though it’s something we can always do later.

If this is you, ‘Wake, awake! For night is flying!’ Repent of your sins and prepare for the Savior’s return!

For ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:9)

And we know, ***“... when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.”*** (Galatians 4:4)

And so the advent season of the Christian Church serves not only to prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the birth of the world's Savior – that miraculous first coming of Jesus to the earth in the form of a lowly human child – but the advent season *also* serves to direct our attention and re-focus our lives to prepare and be ever watchful for the *second* coming of the Lord.

Yes, Christ is coming again.

And on that awe-filled day, He shall come, not as a lowly servant of man, but He shall come in all His unveiled glory and majesty to call before His righteous judgment seat all that ever had life and breath on this earth.

Now of the truth of Christ's Second Coming all men may come to learn – *both the believer and unbeliever*. However such knowledge of Christ's momentous coming in all His divine glory and righteousness can only fill the heart and mind of natural unregenerate man – *the unbelieving and impenitent sinner* – with the deepest dread and darkest horror. For the knowledge that natural man has of God is woefully and fatally incomplete.

You see, though natural man has the Law of God written in his heart, since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, his knowledge of God is based upon a perverted and erroneous reading of much of that Law. So much so, that much of what natural man believes to be right and good may well be sin and that which he believes to be wrong and unjust behavior is often just the opposite.

Furthermore, the Truth of God's Law serves to convict man of his sin. It does not – nor can it ever – provide for him a way to escape the eternal damnation he deserves as the wages of his sin other than that of keeping the Law perfectly in every single point.

But this is utterly impossible for man. For as the Scriptures clearly teach, man is sinful from his birth – yea, from his very conception – as we read in Psalms 51:5: ***“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*** And in James 2:10: ***“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”***

Therefore there is no way of escape for man in or of himself. Neither can any man redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him for the redemption of their souls is so very costly. (Psalm 49:7,8)

Hence the Law only drives natural unregenerate man to despair and keeps him in willful continued slavery to it. He remains an enemy of God – lost and condemned to the hell he deserves.

And so what results is an unbelieving and impenitent heart stirred to utter fear and trembling at the learning of Christ's Second Coming. For what person so unarmed and so woefully unprepared spiritually does not fear the coming of his final Judge and Executioner?

This same knowledge of Christ's Second Coming also stirs the hearts of the believers.

Yes, we who by the grace of God alone have died to sin and been reborn in our baptism to Christ are also stirred – *not to fear and trepidation* – but we are stirred to joyfully petition the Holy Spirit to multiply unto us God's blessings of divine grace and peace!

Now these are blessings which do not come by mere *head knowledge* of “the true meaning of Christmas” or who Jesus was as a historical figure.

But God's grace and peace come to man only through an intimate *heart knowledge* – an intimate communion with the Prince of Peace – worked by God the Holy Spirit in the heart of man by the Gospel in Word and Sacrament alone.

It is *solely* the divine power and working of God that creates saving faith in man's heart. It is *solely* the divine power and working of God that turns a person from the darkness of sin and death – from fear and trepidation of a Righteous, Angry God – to the glorious light and life, peace, joy, and eternal salvation found only in Christ Jesus.

Man can do *absolutely nothing* to accomplish it.

Natural, unregenerate man cannot “make a personal decision to follow Christ” or “invite Christ into his heart”. Nor can he cooperate with God in any way or to any degree whatsoever to earn or achieve salvation for himself. For natural unregenerate man is *dead* in trespasses and sin and just as a dead body cannot raise itself up or perform any other act of its own accord, neither can unregenerate man do anything to gain for himself salvation. And he most certainly does not deserve salvation on account of his many sins.

But what sinful man cannot do Almighty God in His divine and unsearchable goodness and mercy does indeed! He graciously works faith in the heart of man through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament – *the Means of Grace*.

Thanks be to God! – Amen?

Through this – the Means of Grace – He calls us, draws us and gathers to Himself *all* believers everywhere and in every era of man.

Through this – the Means of Grace – He then provides, strengthens, and sustains the hand of faith with which each and every believer personally apprehends the forgiveness of his sins, life and eternal salvation.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8,9)

By Grace Alone, through faith alone we are reborn in Christ as new creatures.

By Grace Alone, through faith alone we are no longer mortal enemies of God.

And more! Through the blood atonement of Christ Jesus for all sin on that accursed cross of Calvary, we are each of us adopted by God the Father as His own dear sons and daughters! As such, we can approach our Heavenly Father as His dear beloved children, *not* with fear and trembling, but with full confidence that He will hear our petitions and grant us all that we need to keep our bodies and souls in this life.

And yet even more! Purely out of His divine Fatherly goodness and mercy, God not only reveals and gives to us all the temporal blessings we need to live as His children here on this earth, but He grants unto us the sure and blessed hope of the everlasting glories which await us in heaven.

And so, ***by Grace Alone***, as God’s own adopted sons and daughters, we are made joint heirs of heaven and eternal glory through faith in Christ Jesus.

My dear Christ Friends, All this Christ, our Savior did, ***NOT*** so that we might continue undaunted or complacent in sin, but so that we would have the full forgiveness of all our sins and that we should be strengthened in faith and in fervent love towards one another. In His Gospel He gives us the spiritual power to put on the new man – which after Christ is created in righteousness and true holiness – that we should live a life of humble and grateful service to our Lord and Savior and that we might possess an ever-growing faith-life empowered by the Holy Spirit to flee the corruption, degeneration, decay and death which is in this world on account of sin. ***“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*** (Ephesians 2:10)

Oh, what great blessings and precious promises Our Lord has given to us, indeed!

And so, Dear Friends, because we have received *so much, so freely* from God for Christ's sake, let us endeavor with all diligence to show forth to all the world the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Let us freely and unashamedly exhibit the fruits of faith worked in our hearts by our God and Savior so that others might see our good works and come to know and glorify our Heavenly Father! Let us exhibit a godly strength and a Christ-like attitude which daily seeks not our own will, nor the fleeting pleasures of this fading materialistic world. But rather led by the Holy Spirit to daily reading and studying of God's Holy Word, let us come to know, understand and diligently perform that which our Heavenly Father wills.

This, in turn, will bring forth in our lives the proper self-control and steadfastness to daily put to death our old adam, to shun evil and to do good, and in spite of all the temptations of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh, to live a godly life, dedicated to living for our Lord.

Furthermore, my dear Friends, we know that such a faith in Jesus Christ cannot be prevented from producing acts of true Christian love that flow *outward* to our fellow men – forgiving one another, fore-bearing one another in meekness and humility, sharing the sorrow of our neighbor's failures and loss, as well as the joys of his God-given success, seeking to alleviate the suffering and fulfilling the needs of those less fortunate and – *yes* – in wholeheartedly devoting our time, talent, and material blessings in working to bring those who sit in spiritual darkness to the knowledge of their sins by the Law of God, and the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation freely offered to all in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To live and do otherwise while claiming to be a Child of God is to be as one who is so blinded by the selfish cares, hedonistic pursuits and materialism of this world, that he has allowed something else to become his god in this very life and he has indeed forgotten his own sinfulness and how dire his own need of the Savior is!

For true faith in Christ is not stagnate. It does not say: *'Yes, I believe Jesus Christ was born and lived and died for me, but I will live and act as I please.'*

Neither is true faith, as it were a piece of dead driftwood, to be tossed about on a sea of sinful human reasoning, vain philosophies of men and worldly pleasures.

True faith in Christ Jesus is *alive!* And it produces real growth in daily sanctification, in the steadfast performance of good works, in living a forgiving and selfless life in thankful service to God and one's neighbor, and especially towards those who are members of the household of faith in Christ Jesus.

And so dear Christians, with the God-given knowledge of all that He has accomplished for us in Christ, let us always remember that we, who deserve not even the least of all His tender goodness and mercies, have been called by Him to partake of His glory and to live our lives in excellence of virtue here and in eternity through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

So, Be Fruitful in the Knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ!

Amen.

And now may the peace of God, the Love of Christ and the Communion of the Holy Ghost keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.