

Celebrate Advent and Christmas with Bishop Laurie Haller – Week Three: Gifts

Grace and peace on this third Sunday in the season of Advent. We are continuing our series of Advent videos with themes that relate to the spiritual disciplines that we vow to practice as United Methodists. We commit to support the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. The theme of our devotion today is gifts.

1 Thessalonians is the apostle Paul's earliest letter, which means that it is our oldest existing Christian document. Paul is writing this letter out of love and concern for the new Christians in Thessalonica in northern Greece as they attempt to defend their faith in Christ.

I am reading from chapter five, verses 16-24. Paul says, "Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't suppress the Spirit. Don't brush off Spirit-inspired messages but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good. Avoid every kind of evil. Now, may the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him; and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept intact and blameless at our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this."

We all know that this is a very difficult time in the life of our world. The coronavirus has taken its toll. On the day I recorded this video, 51 million cases of COVID-19 and 1.3 million deaths worldwide had been recorded. Most of us have never seen any tragedy like this in our lifetime.

Yet here the apostle Paul says, "Rejoice always." Do you rejoice always? Are you grateful even in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances? Do you see how Paul is encouraging the Thessalonian Christians as well as you and me to exercise the spiritual gifts that God has given to each one of us? Those gifts include prayer, gratitude, and thanksgiving, for this is God's will for us.

Rather than lament what we cannot do, God is calling you and me to imagine what we can do by using the gifts that God has given us to make a difference in the world. Do you see my mask? It says, "Iowa Conference, The United Methodist Church. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God."

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, had Three General Rules that continue to serve today as guidelines for the people of God called Methodists. Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. Three simple rules.

My sisters and brothers, you and I are called to use the gifts that God has given each one of us to share Christ's love and make a difference in the world. Each one of you has a gift. It doesn't matter how old you are, where you live, what color your skin is, or how much education you have. You have a gift! That gift might include a call to rejoice always, pray continually, give generously, reach out to those who are suffering, share with others the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ, and never quench the Spirit of God which dwells in each one of you. What is your gift, and how will you use it to do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Let us pray.

(Singing)

What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a Wise man, I would do my part; yet what can I give him: give my heart.