

Thirsty Scrooge 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24  
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (December 14,) 2014

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray constantly, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit, <sup>20</sup> do not despise prophesying, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good, <sup>22</sup> abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>23</sup> May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

We have been focusing on the character of Ebenezer Scrooge in our Advent sermons. Here's a clip of dialogue from the Saint Marks' play version. It's where the Ghost of Christmas Present makes his entrance into Scrooge's home, as earlier predicted by the Ghost of Jacob Marley. The Ghost is explaining the reason for his visit – making reference to how such a brother Ghost visits at this time every year:

Ghost: Each year, at this time, one of us visits this puny planet to spread some JOY and to remove as many as we can of the causes of human misery, which is why I have come to see you-Ebenezer Scrooge.

Scrooge: Let me assure you, sir, that I am a man of highest principles and the most generous spirit.

Ghost: Ha-Ha-Ha- "Generous Spirit?!" Let me assure you sir that you don't know the meaning of the phrase. But you are going to. Here drink this.

Scrooge: What is it

Ghost: Taste it. Do you like it?

Scrooge: It is wonderful. I've never tasted anything like it.

Ghost: There are more good things in life than you can possible imagine.

Scrooge: I'm sure there are. Can I have some more?

In the brief snippet of dialogue you just heard, Scrooge was introduced to the beginning of his conversion experience by the drink given him.

- It was wonderful.
- It was unlike anything he had ever had.
- It quenched a thirsting that he had all along, and that was a thirsting for JOY.

Our word for the day is J O Y. In keeping with our “acrostic” theme for Advent, let me suggest that the letters of J O Y will say much about what we thirst for and what will quench it.

### **J is for JESUS.**

I’ve heard, over the years, people tell me that they just don’t seem to get into the Christmas spirit this time of year. And there are a variety of reasons. And I certainly don’t make light of any of the reasons. This is a time of the year (as evidenced by our need to do the Blue Christmas worship this evening) for people to not feel holly jolly.

But, let me suggest that one of the things for which a thirsting will cure many of the Advent blues is JESUS.

(This is the part that the Worship Committee urged me to preach about, and I said that I had some fear about it – that it might go from preaching into meddling.)

**One of the big reasons for happiness AND for misery at this time of the year is one and the same: F A M I L Y.**

- It is a time when families get together and share in precious memory building.
- It is also a time when families get together and have a hard time trying to live up to expectations for doing it right – many of which are imposed by oneself.
- It is also a time of the year when “the empty chair” seems most preeminent – the memories of Christmases past, with the knowledge that they can never be the same again.

All of these are real.

But here’s the thing: **The FAMILY thing at Christmas is meant to be SECONDARY.**

## **The first thing about Christmas is JESUS.**

I confess that I get a bit perturbed by the “holier than thou” attitudes expressed at this time of year – where people beat up other people for “taking Christ out of Christmas.”

I don’t think Jesus would have ever done it. I think Jesus would have said something like this: **“YOU, keep ME first in YOUR celebration of MY birthday, and let other people do their own thing. When you spend your energy beating up other people for not doing it ‘right,’ you certainly are not keeping my love and grace forefront. You’re just substituting your agenda for theirs ... and you really sound a lot like a Pharisee, in my name. Trust me: I don’t need that kind of help today, any more than my Father needed their kind of help back then.”**

We need JESUS to quench our thirst.

When we put Jesus first, then all of the other stuff may come and may go, but Jesus remains constantly in first place.

**“Easy to say, preacher. Tougher to do.** You know we do have lots of pressures on us at this time of the year. It’s hard to keep Jesus first.”

That’s right. So let’s go to **Letter O – which stands for OBSERVATION.**

### **What are you looking for?**

This is not new. Paul wrote the words we heard today to the Church folks in Thessaloniki about the same stuff.

**When you focus on GIVING THANKS it’s easier to REJOICE.**

**We really do tend to see what we are looking for.**

If, when we go to the mall, we are only looking for people to not give us the service to which we think we are entitled, then (by golly!) that is what we will find.

If, we look for JESUS wherever we go, we will tend to find him.

Here's an experiment to try: when you go to the mall (or wherever you go shopping) watch the people. That's it; take a break, sit, and watch.

Now – remember that each one of these people was – like you – made in the image of God. And Jesus came at Christmas (Emmanuel, God-with-us) to show us how the image of God was meant to look like in flesh.

Look for that Jesus in each person. It's there, if you look. It's easy to miss if you're not looking for it.

This is just the way humans work. Buy a new car and realize how many of that particular kind of car are on the highway. You never saw them before. You weren't looking.

In the line right before the lines Scrooge and Ghost of Christmas Present spoke to begin this sermon, Ghost says: I am the Ghost of Christmas Present. Now, look upon me. You have never seen the likes of me before.

And Scrooge responds: Never!

Ghost: And yet how many of my brothers have you rejected in your miserable lifetime?

Scrooge: I have never met your brothers, sir.

Ghost: You have never looked for them!

We see what we are looking for. **Look for Jesus. It's not about you. It's about Jesus.**

Yesterday, the Worship Committee was meeting here to plan for the season of Epiphany. Just before our ending, Terry Davis came to alert Janet and me of a situation. When we went downstairs, we found in the room where the bride and her bridesmaids were getting dressed for the wedding, that a local person, recently released from the hospital (we could tell from the wristband he wore) had apparently

self-medicated, followed a bridesmaid into their dressing room and passed out, face down on the floor. The EMTs were called.

He was roused up, and two EMTs and I “assisted” his leaving the room to be put on an ambulance gurney. Two members of the Worship Committee held the doors open. And the other Worship Committee members still there could be heard, each saying, one after another: “He IS a beloved child of God, precious and beautiful to behold.”

And because that’s what they saw, and spoke, the members of the bridal party also had a completely different attitude than what you might have guessed.

We DO tend to see what we are looking to see – even if previous conditioned responses may have been different.

And, just for fun, here’s another add-on to that experiment I gave you for the mall during your shopping: When you look for Jesus in the person walking toward you, and then when you see it, do this: Telepath to that person – don’t actually say a word – but mentally telepath to that person this message: *I see Jesus in you: God bless you!* Watch how that person reacts to your sending this silent message to them. Honest to goodness, you may have so much fun doing this, you forget to finish your shopping.

**Okay. Letter number three of J O Y is Y. It stands for YOU.**

I just said: “**Look for Jesus. It’s not about you. It’s about Jesus.**”

Now, hear this: **It’s about YOU.**

**You hold the keys to JOY in your hand.**

**JOY** I said, not “happiness.”

Happiness is the circumstances that you insist on to satisfy you. I don’t know how God Almighty could keep all of us happy.

But **JOY is about finding the stuff that quenches our thirst in life that God alone provides. You don't have to pick it; it finds you, if you allow.**

And YOU alone are able to allow that to happen.

Today is December 14. You have 10 days left until the Great Feast of Christmas begins.

(It actually begins on the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup>. Not only is that the way the Church has practiced the Feast Days for centuries; it's also the way God counts days. Look at the the first chapter of Genesis, and see how the days are counted: **there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Then there was evening and there was morning, the second day.** Etc. etc. The day begins with the evening, not the morning.

I digress.)

There are 10 days left until the Great Feast of Christmas.

The Greatest Feast Day of the entire Christian year, many would argue. (Is it Easter or Christmas? It's a split opinion. In December, I heavily favor Christmas as the greatest. Ask me again in March or April and I may waver.)

There are 10 days left until the Great Feast of Christmas.

Are YOU ready?

- Not the shopping, cooking, card sending, party visiting, decorating.

Are you ready for Jesus?

Each year is a fresh installment of Jesus being born into your life.

Take full advantage of the time you have left.

**You will never have another Christmas like this one to prepare for.**

- Slow down
- Drink in the details
- Prioritize what's REALLY important.

YOU alone have charge of your life – to choose what you will observe. Will it be Jesus or something else? If it's something else, do you really think it's more important than Jesus?

**God put on human flesh, to become one of us, to both show and empower us to become like Jesus ... to reach the potential of divinity which we were created to be.**

What will you choose?

HOPE, PEACE, and JOY are the gifts provided.

Will YOU look for them?

They are there if you will but look.

Don't quench the gift that was made to satisfy. Don't quench the spirit of Christmas. **LIVE it** ... nice and slow ... **LIVE it**, by paying attention. ... **LIVE it** by finding it in some of the most unusual persons who come bearing the gift to you.

**LIVE it in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**