

Be Thankful for Your Fellow Miracles

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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Pastor Hanneman

Why are you a Christian? Why do you still come to church on a regular basis? That isn't an uncommon question, but what is the answer?

Many people will say, "I am a Christian because that was how I was brought up." "I am a Christian because I went to this church all my life and this is where I call home." "I am a Christian because my parents made me."

Is that how you see it? Is that the answer you would give or have given in the past? Does your Christianity rely on your upbringing? Truly, it had a lot to do with it, but this isn't why you are a Christian today. No, the answer isn't found in what we or our parents have done. No, the answer is found in what our God has done and still does for us.

Today, Paul tells why we can say that we are a Christian, grace. It is by God's miraculous power that brought us to faith in him. When we consider our natural condition when being born all we can do is marvel at our God's power. This also, helps us in seeing those who come to church with us differently. When we see just how grateful to God we should be to be called Christian we will also be appreciative of our fellow Christians who are saved by that same power and might. It is the power of God that unites us uniquely together. Today Paul reminds that we should be thankful for our fellow miracles.

The congregation in Thessalonica was a very young congregation when Paul wrote his two letters. He visited them on his second missionary journey where he started a church. The church was thriving but already in its infancy it was facing hardships. From the outside they were being persecuted for listening to Paul's teaching about Jesus Christ. On the inside they were plagued with confusion over everything Paul taught. This confusion over Paul's teachings was creating a rift with the members there.

So, Paul writes to them to clear up this confusion. But, as he writes to them notice how he addresses this group that is becoming divided: ¹³ ***But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*** ¹⁴ ***He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Paul doesn't scold them. He doesn't even take sides. Instead, he gives thanks for them. Why does he give thanks for all of them? He gives thanks because they are all children of God.

When rifts show up we tend to see each person as either for us or against us. This isn't just a symptom of our society, but this can happen in the church. It could have been easy for Paul to say well I am thankful for those who are not so ignorant. I'm thankful for those who are not causing problems. But, instead he thanks the Lord for them all. Paul didn't see anyone as for or against him, but he saw all of them as those loved by the Lord.

Paul understood, that even though there were some problems or strife that it didn't change the fact that they still all believed who their Lord was and that they were chosen to be saved.

Is that how you see your fellow members? Do you label each other as children of God, chosen by him, saved, and heirs of the glories of Christ? Not always do we. No, instead we look at our fellow members differently. Instead of seeing them as our God sees us we see them according to our own standards.

It doesn't take long for anyone to figure out that everyone who goes to church isn't like me. But, for many of us that is a problem that we can't seem to overcome. Do you look at one of your fellow members and see them as the one who needs to know everything about everyone? Do you look at one of your fellow members as the one who doesn't have good taste in dress or fashion? Do you look at one of your fellow members as the one who is always must state their opinion about everything? Do you look at one of your fellow members as the one who never seems to be as able to pitch in as you think he/she should?

Because we are different we are all going to live life differently. But being different isn't a sin. Not seeing things your way or knowing what you know isn't wrong. But, does that bother you to the point that you might even avoid spending time or speaking with that person when you come to church? Do you get caught up in all the negative aspects of others who don't see eye to eye with your or would even say your opinions are wrong? Do you feel that everyone in church must be more like you and if they aren't then there is something wrong with them?

We can easily get caught up in thoughts like that because we too often feel that our thoughts and wants are better or godlier than others. But, they are not. We who see things one way are no different in God's eyes than those who see things differently. If a fellow member is getting under your skin because of how they dress, think, or act, isn't their fault but yours for letting it bother you and for not seeing your fellow member for who he/she really is: a living breathing walking miracle.

The Thessalonians had their differences too. They were found more in their understanding of everything Paul said. But, just because someone misunderstood Paul didn't mean that they were an unbeliever and was to be rejected or mistreated. No, they still believed but needed to loving correction.

Did God die for your fellow members? Did God choose to save your fellow members? Did God bring God's Word and Sacraments into their life and create faith in them? Did God send his Holy Spirit into their lives? The answer is yes!

But, think about how amazing it is for anyone one of us to be able to say, "Yes," at all. We are all born equally sinful and unable to save ourselves. We are born enemies of God who hate God and everything about God. We don't want to be saved or to serve our God. Instead, we want to serve ourselves. And yet, God the Holy Spirit someone how using the truth of his word brought us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, without forcing us to do it, so that we could inherit the glory Christ won by doing all the work of salvation for us. How did God do it? How is it possible that we didn't act like many others by throwing God's message away as trash and continue living our sinful lives against God? We don't know. All we do know is that we believe and are saved by Jesus Christ.

It's a miracle anyone believes and is saved. You are a miracle and I am a miracle. We are all miracles and for that reason we should give thanks that we are able to gather around God's Word with our fellow miracles because everything could have been so different.

Instead of focusing on each other's flaws because we have many we need to see each other as our God sees us: his miracle children. Be thankful that God has saved you and them so that we all can go to heaven.

Also, don't lose what your God has given you. Paul encourages us: *¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

We can help each other stand firm by reminding each other of our status before God. Is a fellow member struggling with life? Remind that person that God loves them and will make this work out for them. Is a fellow member have trouble feeling self-worth? Remind that member that Jesus loves them so much that he died for them to bring them to heaven. Is a member going through something that you feel helpless about? Remind them that you are praying for them because you care about them.

We are all different, but we are all the same in the eyes of God. Focus on our similarities and together we will go far as a congregation. How we see each other will affect everything about us. We will be more willing to attend Bible Class because there we will grow with our fellow believers. We will be more willing to reach out to the lost because we know that we could easily be the ones who need reaching out to. We will be more willing to pitch in and help support this ministry with our time, talents, and money, because we know how valuable it is to have a place we can go to where we will hear the full truth of God's Word all the time.

Give thanks for each other. You are all treasures in God's eyes. He has chosen you to be his and made sure you are through his Word and by his grace he will continue to keep you as his own, little miracle. Amen.