

"Not Always From, Sometimes Through"

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-14

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with gratitude; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with faith, hope, and confidence. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

"Anything is possible – if you can get someone else to do it." Some of you will no doubt recognize the oft-repeated line from a former member of St. Paul that we tend to use a lot around here. We *use* it a lot because it *fits* a lot. It's always easier to come up with great ideas for *others* to carry out. Which, for example, is easier – drawing up a list of projects at church or actually doing the work necessary to correct the problems? To say, "Hey, the lawn needs to be mowed" or to go out and mow the lawn? To come up with outreach ideas, or to actually witness your faith to others? You get the point.

Disturbingly enough, the devil and his minions undoubtedly say much the same thing. Think of it. Satan loves sin. He recognizes the pain and destruction that sin creates, and he is positively gleeful about the stuff. But he's got a problem. Sin is his idea, but his goal is to get *someone else to do it*. The reality is that the devil and his vast hoard have to rely on human beings to commit the sin they love. No one can *make* you sin. The devil can tempt, entice, cajole, but he can't force. In this sense it is altogether true that sin is only possible if he can get others to do it.

In our text for this morning we will find application of that insight – information as to just exactly how the devil is playing us against each other, and against ourselves. The text that will guide, instruct and comfort us this morning is found in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians, the Second Chapter:

ESV **2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-14** *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of*

worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming... ¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So far the Word of God. Think of it! *The Word of God*. How we ought to treasure every exposure to something so divine, so holy, so good for us. That our God would give us such appreciation for this gift – and then fill us with all good things through the study of His Words – so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen.**"

Interesting thought, isn't it: "*Sin is only possible if Satan can get someone else to do it.*" Obviously the devil can sin. Scripture tells us in 1 John 3:8 that "**the devil has been sinning from the beginning.**" Yet he knows that he is already lost and condemned, his great sin now lies not so much in doing as it is in causing others to do. Think of the first temptation in the Garden of Eden. The devil had no power over Adam and Eve that they did not themselves give or allow him. He couldn't *make* them do anything. "*No!*" and "*Be gone, Satan!*" would have solved the thing. It obviously worked for Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness.

The devil can only tempt, but tempt he most certainly will. This is the first application of our rather cryptic theme for this morning: "*Not Always From, Sometimes Through.*" The hard, cold fact is that God does not always keep bad things *from* us; sometimes he just preserves us *through* them.

Stop here for just a moment and marvel not only at the truth of what we just heard but at how that truth has played out in your own individual life. Have there been difficult things in your life? Obviously. And yet the fact that you are still here and are still being preserved in the Christian faith is prima facie evidence that God can be trusted to *always* carry us *through* – even though we might rather he preserved us *from*. We

would rather, in other words, be spared the whole ordeal, rather than have to be preserved through. Why is that not always possible? Probably many reasons, chief of which is me; or, in your case, you. You and I are just too dense, thick, dull, slow, stubborn (pick your adjective) to remember the hard lessons of life. Usually all we need to forget is for things to go well for a bit. We drift, we forget, we wander – and God has to call us back. Most often the only way he can get our attention is by slapping us up-side the head. Obviously the fault is ours, not his.

This brings us finally around to our sermon text for this morning. Clearly there were several lies and temptations the Christians in Thessalonica had to be preserved *through* rather than spared *from*. The first was the lie that Christ had already returned – together with the obvious result for the Thessalonians that they had missed it and therefore missed out. Paul in our text offers evidence to disprove the lie, and his evidence was the fact that the Antichrist had not yet been revealed.

Now, before we go any farther, stop for a moment of introspection – self analysis. What was your reaction when I mentioned "the Antichrist"? Unfortunately the reaction of many is *"Oh no. Let's not go there. That whole thing makes me uncomfortable. Can't we just talk about something else?"*

In light of Jesus' parting words to all Christians that we are supposed to "teach them all things, whatsoever I (Jesus) have commanded you," the answer is no, we can't just ignore this and talk about something else. In fact this is yet another example of what we talked about at the beginning – Satan's mantra that *"any sin is possible if you can get someone else to do it."*

One of the reasons the Reformation was so successful and has stood the test of time is the *clarity* that God gave the reformers – and to us through the reformers. Today we are plagued by religious double-speak. Not so then. Then they identified not only what they taught and believed, but also what they rejected. Clearly. Again, the obvious pattern today is to speak always and only in vague generalities with which nearly everyone can agree. The poster child for this trend is the so-called joint agreement between the ELCA and the Roman Catholic Church on justification. You may recall several years ago representatives of those two church bodies met to find common ground on what each meant by justification – this despite the fact that no official change had taken place in the Catholic Church since the days of Martin Luther. The result was not only a 15 page document that used many words while actually saying *nothing*, it also gave birth to the toxic lie that the Reformation had all been just one big

misunderstanding - that Lutherans and Catholics actually believe pretty much exactly the same thing.

So what is Satan up to these days? More than we'll ever know, but one thing is obvious: he hates it when we condemn anything. The first step in achieving his goal is to create a church-full of spiritual Rodney Kings all chanting in unison: *"Can't we all just get along?"* God's answer: *"Not as long as there is darkness in the world. Light can have no agreement with darkness."* Nor is it ever safe or wise to act as if the darkness is anything better or more acceptable than what it is.

Now, plug our text into this truth. The Holy Spirit here, writing by verbal inspiration of the Apostle Paul, tells us several things about the Antichrist. First, the error of the Antichrist was already at work in Paul's day. Second, the Antichrist would claim to be part of the Church, so the attack would come from within rather than from without. Third, the Antichrist would set himself up as equal to God on earth. Fourth, he would remain until he is exposed in a very public way for all the world to see, and, finally, though mortally wounded by the revelation, he would remain in power until the coming of Christ on Judgment Day.

What alone today fits such a description? Clearly only the Roman Catholic Papacy, which began even while some of the Apostles were alive, was an attack from within, claims infallibility still today, was exposed by God's Reformation of the 16th Century, and yet is still in existence today.

Yet we would rather not talk about such things – which is exactly what Satan had in mind. He had the idea that we should all just stop talking about sin and error, that we should all just stop condemning anything as wrong, and he's "gotten someone else to do it for him" – someone else to act on and carry out his idea. You and me. In other words, he has created a culture in our society that makes us feel guilty for honestly acknowledging the truth – or at least certain parts of the truth – whenever that truth can be construed as negative for anyone else. You and I are in danger of accepting the ridiculous notion that it is somehow virtuous to refuse to condemn that which God himself condemns. Take care, fellow Christians, not only that you yourself should avoid the deception, but that you do not become part of the problem. Peter didn't think he was doing anything wrong when Jesus said to him, **"Get behind me, Satan."** Don't be the one who carries out the devil's plan.

Yet again some will inevitably ask, "Why did it have to be this way? Why did God allow an Antichrist to come into existence? Why didn't he just prevent this and so many other bad things from afflicting us?" In answer we go back once again to our theme: "Not Always From, Sometimes Through." No human being can know the mind of God or plumb the depths of his wisdom. God is God, we are not – which means we are to close our mouths and bow to his wisdom. **"Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth!"** (Psalm 46)

Yet all of this would be cold comfort if not for where our text takes us next. God's Word never just leaves us with gloom and warning for warning's sake. Scripture always seeks our benefit and our salvation. So also we don't talk about evil to make us feel better about ourselves, but so that we might be protected and preserved. Our text therefore continues: **"But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Want to ask a baffling question? Ask yourself why God would choose to save a sinner like you. And yet he did, didn't he? It was not just others; it was you he called through the gospel. It was you he brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Want to know the ultimate "anything is possible if you can get someone else to do it"? Our salvation. We couldn't choose God, he had to choose us. We couldn't pay for our sins, God had to do that for us – which is why he sent his Son, Jesus Christ. God chose to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts through the preaching of the gospel so that we might come to believe some otherwise unbelievable truths; namely, that God now sees you and me as innocent and holy because his Son has paid in full for all that we have ever – or will ever – do wrong. God shattered our rock-hard, stubbornly unbelieving hearts, he there created saving faith, and he has thereby set our feet on the path to eternal life. More than that, the life that he has now created in us will never die.

Listen again to the last line of our text and allow it to sink in – because it applies not just to the masses, not just to others – it applies to, speaks to, you: **"To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

God in his wisdom will not always keep trial and hardship from us. But he most certainly can be trusted to preserve us *through* such things. As he has,

so he will. Cling to that promise and patiently wait for his final proof when he comes to take you home. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Exodus 3:1-15** Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ ¶ Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." ¹³ ¶ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

^{ESV} **Luke 20:27-40** There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, ²⁸ ¶ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." ³⁴ ¶ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. ³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost – November 10, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 437 (Red Hymnal)

"Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Exodus 3:1-15) Moses was raised and trained by God to lead his people out of Egyptian slavery. Yet for many years he worked as a shepherd, until finally the Lord called to him from the burning bush. While there are many aspects to this account, the one on which we focus this morning is the Old Testament proof of the Resurrection and life after death

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 66 (Page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 20:27-40) Our New Testament lesson is tied to our Old Testament lesson in that it explains the ongoing significance of the LORD's words to Moses at the burning bush. There not only did our God give himself a name for all time, he also gave evidence that he is not a God of the dead but of the living, thereby providing proof of the coming resurrection of all the dead.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 435 (Red Hymnal)

"My Spirit on Thy Care"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-14 (See back page of this bulletin)

"Not Always From, Sometimes Through"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Pre-communion Hymn – 317 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Alas My God My Sins Are Great"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 434 (Stanzas 1, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"O God of Jacob by Whose Hand"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (38) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee time |
| Wednesday | -6:00 p.m. | – Confirmation Class |
| | -7:00 p.m. | – Mid-Week Bible Class |
| Next Sunday | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee time |

CLC News – Allen Durham has returned the calls to Bowdle and Ipswich.

Berea of Sioux Falls has called Steven Sydow. Immanuel of Mankato has called Jay Sydow to teach high school math and science.

Christmas Party – Please remember to add your name to the Church Christmas

Party sign-up sheet on the mailbox table if you plan to attend this year's party. It's a big help to those planning the event to know how many to expect.

Church Council Notes – All members of the Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the meeting on 11/3. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for October were \$697 below budgeted needs, but still \$1,625 above budgeted needs YTD. Sam Meyer, Phil Pfennig, and Pastor Roehl will serve as this year's Nominating Committee. The terms of Phil Pfennig and Sam Meyer expire in December. A preliminary budget for 2020 was presented for editing, along with an agenda for the 12/22 Annual Voters Meeting. One of the items to be discussed at the Annual Meeting will be the possible addition of screens in the sanctuary for the projection of liturgy and hymns during the service. Pastor Roehl will send out more information for consideration and feedback prior to the meeting. The next Council meeting is scheduled for December 8.