

Text: Philippians 1:3-8.

Second Sunday in Advent.

December 6, 2015.

Grace and peace are yours through our coming Savior, Jesus. Amen.

Can I share a personal pet peeve with you? I know that's not the best way to start a sermon, but there's a point. I really don't like the way pastors are typically portrayed in TV shows and movies. One movie I can remember shows a pastor at a wedding. He's constantly asking about the fee. Then, in classic movie style, the couple decides, on the spot, not to get married, but the bride to be and the best man decide, on the spot, that they want to get married. They ask the pastor to marry them and he says, "Totally new fee, right?" What a greedy money grubber! Is that how pastor really feels about you? There's even a show I ran across called *Impastor*. It's about a guy who is going to commit suicide by jumping off a bridge. A pastor sees him and tries to help him. But then the pastor falls off the bridge. So the other guy assumes his identity and pretends to be a pastor. He lies to people. He has a prostitute. He doesn't have a clue about the Bible. He gets sermons online. But it's a nice, comfortable position, with a free house to boot. Is that how pastor feels about you? Ok. Enough of my ranting. But I pray if you know me at all, you can see why that hurts. Your pastor isn't in it for the money, although I am well taken care of. Your pastor isn't just fooling around, pretending to be something. This is a high and holy calling. That's how pastor feels about you. You are God's precious people. That's how pastor feels about you. You are valuable souls, bought by the very blood of Jesus. That's how pastor feels about you. How does pastor feel about you? Is it ok if I borrow some words from a pastor in the Bible, pastor Paul, who wrote Philippians?

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. Thanks! That's how pastor feels about you. Every time I remember you. Every time! Every time you are mentioned, I thank God. Every time I think about you, I thank God. I always pray with joy. Those are some cool words. I thank God for every person here. Every week. Seriously. Every person. Every week. I thank God for each one of you, during worship, after worship, before I go home. Every person. Every week. Reason to give thanks. As I pray for you during the week (and I seriously do!), I give thanks. Every person at every Bible study, a reason to give thanks. Sunday morning. Tuesday morning. Thursday evening. Bible 101. Vine and Branches. Every person. Every week. Reason to give thanks. Reason for joy. Amen! Hallelujah! In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. That's how pastor feels about you.

If only I could say I do that perfectly. What about when you are not here? Is it still thanks? Joy? What about as you look around? They haven't been here in a while, what's wrong with them? Why don't they come more often, like me?! If there's a disagreement, are there still prayers of thanks to be brothers and sisters in Jesus, or does the prayer turn to, "Lord, change them! Lord, make them see it my way! Lord, what's the matter with them?" Let's be honest, our fallen condition, our sinful condition, means we don't always pray only with joy.

So look at what God did. God began a good work in you. God brought you to faith. Maybe a friend told you God's wonderful words, "Jesus loves you. Jesus died for you." Maybe that's how God began the good work in you. Maybe a pastor poured water on your head and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And through those wonderful words, tied to that ordinary water, God began the good work of and brought you to faith. And God helped you see the world differently, as a child of God, a believer in Jesus. But God's work in you is not complete. Yes, Jesus' work of saving the world is finished. Jesus said from the cross, "It is finished!" But God's work in you is

not complete. God hasn't taken you to heaven yet. As long as you are alive on this earth, God is still working in you. God still has work for you to do. God still has to bring his work to completion. We are confident that work will continue. We are certain that God didn't just bring you to faith and now leaves you on your own. God will continue his work, carry it on.

You see, we are in this together. We are partners in the Gospel. There's a pretty cool story of how God did this in Philippi. First, God sent a vision to Paul, of a man begging, "Come to Macedonia and help us!" What a clear sign to go to Macedonia and the specific city of Philippi. When Paul got to Philippi, he held the first Christian worship service on the European continent. Pretty cool, huh? At this first service a woman named Lydia believed the good news and invited Paul to stay in her home and keep on preaching the good news to the people of her city. From the first day, they shared a partnership in the Gospel. From the first day, they worked together. Lydia provided Paul a place to stay so he could be free to preach the good news full time. Paul kept on preaching the good news and more people were brought to faith.

Paul didn't lord it over the people of Philippi, "I'm the first one who told you about Jesus! I know way more about the Bible than you do." No! That's not how pastor feels about you. They shared in the Gospel. They were all sinners, who all needed the same forgiveness, the same Jesus. That's how pastor feels about you. We have a partnership. We are working together to bring the Gospel to more people. That's how pastor feels about you. I am confident that God will continue his good work in you. I am confident that God will continue to move you to invite friends and family to hear the good news. And I trust you are confident that I will instruct people you bring. I will teach the whole truth of God's Word. We'll start with Bible 101 and 201 and 301, but we won't stop there, we'll continue with Vine and Branches and more sermons that proclaim God's truth and we won't stop until we are all together in heaven. That's our partnership, working together to be God's instruments to get people to heaven. That's how pastor feels about you.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart. Since I have you in my heart. That's how pastor feels about you. I had to stop and reread this phrase. Since I have you in my heart. What a cool phrase! Since I have you in my heart. What an awesome example. Since I have you in my heart. This is my mindset. This is where my mind is, on you. This is where my heart is, on you. This is one of the coolest parts about being a pastor, that I have you in my heart. I am confident that you know that if you are sick, you can call me, and I'll be there. If you are hurting, you can talk to me and I will listen. If you don't know what to do and you need God's Word to be applied, I'll pray with you and help you apply God's Word. Once, I was talking with a family from our church about a personal problem and the conversation was getting long and it was getting late and they kind of apologized, "Pastor, sorry we are keeping you so late." And I said, "No way. This is the good part." I have you in my heart. Think of the biggest things that happened in your life, there was probably a pastor there. Baptism? Confirmation? Marriage? Birth of children? It wasn't just pastor's job to be there. It was pastor's joy to be there. I have you in my heart.

No matter what the circumstances. Consider Paul's circumstances. At the very moment Paul wrote Philippians, Paul was in chains because he would not stop proclaiming the good news about Jesus. But God's Word is not chained! God's Word can never be chained. The Philippians sent Paul help. They sent a person to assist him. They identified with this prisoner. They were not ashamed to say, "This man brought us Jesus. This man was the one God used to save our souls. This man stood up for Jesus and

kept preaching his word, even when that meant prison in our town, and now prison somewhere else. This guy has us on his heart! He's our pastor, even when he's in prison!" Paul went to court to defend the Gospel. Paul kept on confirming that good news about Jesus. Chains couldn't stop the spread of God's Word. Prison couldn't prevent him from telling the good news about Jesus. Paul said, "Philippians, we are in this together. We share in God's grace. We are all equal recipients of God's undeserved love. We share a bond that chains can't break. We share a love that prison can't remove. We share God's grace!" That's how Pastor Paul felt about them.

That's how Pastor Strutz feels about you. I joke with couples who are planning to get married here. I remind them, "You need to get a marriage license before the wedding or I can't legally marry you. I like you guys, but I really don't want to go to jail because you forgot to get a marriage license." And we chuckle and they get a marriage license. But I know the day might come when I have to go to jail for preaching God's Word about marriage. And that's no joke! I may have to be in chains and shackles for defending and confirming the Gospel. And I just pray that I will have the strength to keep on proclaiming all of God's Word. And I pray that you will have the strength to still be proud to say, "That's my pastor. He went to jail rather than give up one word of the Bible. He chose to be mistreated rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. I'm proud to say my pastor stood up for Jesus!"

I know this sermon has been kind of personal. I trust you don't mind. Really, I pray it has led you not closer to me, but closer to Jesus. I pray you have seen the truth of this final verse we read together. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. These words, "long for," and, "affection," they are strong words. Pastor longs for you. That's how I feel about you. I want you to know that I'm living God's Word and longing for you to do the same. Maybe some of you remember a sermon a couple months ago about marriage. At the end of the sermon I urged you to hug your spouse if you were so blessed. After the sermon, I walked over and hugged my wife. Someone told me later, "Pastor, I was surprised. I didn't think you would do that!" I thought, "What? You think I'm just making this stuff up? You think I'm just telling you to do what I'm not doing?" No way! Pastor longs for you to live God's Word and pastor wants to show you how to do that! That's how pastor feels about you.

I long for you to stay strong in God's Word. I long for you to be in worship and Bible study every week. I long for you to read God's Word on your own every day. I want you to be close to Jesus, strong in your faith, well connected with your brothers and sisters in Christ who will help you stay close to Jesus! I long for the best for all of you. Yes, sometimes it's the unpleasant part of being a pastor that I have to warn you when you are falling into sin. But that's only because I long for you to be close to Jesus and in his loving arms. I long for you to feel his loving embrace. I long for you to use Jesus' help to cast that sin aside.

I know I can't perfectly have the same affection that Christ Jesus has. Jesus was perfect. Your pastor is not. But that same affection, that same deep down, pit of the stomach care and concern and compassion that Christ has for you is what pastor longs to have for you. I'm not in this for the money. I'm not here for the glory. I'm in it for Jesus. I want to have the same affection for you that Jesus has for you. That if I could go to hell so you could go to heaven, that's what I would do. That's how pastor feels about you. Amen!