

Second Hand Preacher

First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2015

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

On this First Sunday of Advent, I find it interesting that those who set up the lectionary would place this section of St. Paul's letter for us to reflect on. Love is the main theme in this section of the letter. Paul is really pleading with the Christians of Thessalonica to put on love and to act like Christ Jesus. The first reading and the Gospel point more toward the end times, which is typical for a First Sunday in Advent. All three of the years use some sort of apocalyptic section to their Synoptic Gospels to stand on a teaching for this first week. The emphasis is on the second coming of Christ. So why include something on love?

The answer might be staring us in the face. Love is the end all and be all of the Christian life. Without the eternal love and mercy of a Triune God we are nothing. Love is the foundation that our church is built on. Leadership must be based in love, and I think we see that with the compassion and mercy of Pope Francis. We have a Holy Father who is a true shepherd who smells like his sheep. He relates to the poor and marginalized. He, in one of his first interviews, referred to himself as a sinner. Pope Francis is a leader who is fashioned with the heart of Christ yet grounded in what it means to be human. Jesus Christ was 100% God and 100% human thus making human mercy possible. Pope Francis is calling for a year of Mercy. I believe there can be no mercy without love.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to treat each other better, to act in love. We need to follow Paul's words as well. We live a world of pain regarding race and religion. Problems in Syria, Europe, and even in North Minneapolis occur because of an absence of love. Hopefully this Thanksgiving we were able to experience gratitude for our families, our churches, and our communities. If we can experience gratitude, it is the seeds of joy. Joy is love expressed. We are not talking about a superficial joy, but one that is based in Jesus and all he has done for us.