

"SEEK"

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6, 9-11, 25
SEVENTEENTH S. A. PENTECOST
MESSIAH, BOERNE
SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: PHIL 1:3-6, 9-11, 25

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

INSIDE THE MOTHER'S WOMB DURING A NORMAL PREGANANCY, A
WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP EXISTS BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILD. IN
THE WOMB, ALL THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE BABY ARE SATISFIED:
AIR, WATER, FOOD, SHELTER, WARMTH, AND SAFETY. AS THE BABY
DEVELOPS, SHE OR HE LEARNS—*EVEN IN THE WOMB*—THAT HER OR HIS
CAREGIVER CAN BE TRUSTED. ONCE THE BABY IS BORN, HOWEVER,
SHE OR HE SEEKS TO REESTABLISH THE KIND OF PERFECTLY
SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP PREVIOUSLY ENJOYED IN MOTHER'S
WOMB. IN FACT, THE RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE
BABY AND ITS PRIMARY CAREGIVER—FEMALE OR MALE—DURING HER OR
HIS FIRST YEARS OF LIFE SERVES AS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR ALL FUTURE RELATIONSHIPS.

MANY PEOPLE SEEK TO REESTABLISH SUCH A RELATIONSHIP
LATER IN LIFE IN THE INTIMACY OF MARRIAGE. WHILE SOME
COUPLES FIND SATISFACTION IN THEIR MARRIAGES, OTHERS DO
NOT. THE REASON IS SIMPLE: MARRIAGE DOES NOT
PROVIDE—INDEED, CANNOT PROVIDE—WHAT SO MANY PEOPLE ARE

LACKING IN THEIR LIVES: UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE. SO, THEY KEEP ON LOOKING AND LOOKING. I'M REMINDED OF A HUMOROUS STORY I HEARD ABOUT A YOUNG COUPLE'S VISIT TO THE COUNTY COURTHOUSE. THE COUPLE WENT TO GET A MARRIAGE LICENSE, AND AFTER FILLING OUT THE FORM AND PAYING FOR THE LICENSE, THE FUTURE HUSBAND SAID TO HIS FUTURE WIFE, "NOW I'D LIKE TO BUY A HUNTING LICENSE." SHE REPLIED, "HONEY, YOUR 'HUNTING' DAYS ARE OVER."

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ENJOY A PERFECT, PERSONALLY SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP IN THE WORLD TODAY? THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT SUCH A RELATIONSHIP *IS* POSSIBLE BUT *ONLY* THROUGH GOD'S ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST. BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, GOD THE FATHER CHOSE TO *SEEK* US BY SENDING HIS SON INTO THE WORLD. THROUGH THE PERFECT RELATIONSHIP GOD HAS ESTABLISHED WITH US IN UNION BY FAITH WITH CHRIST BY MEANS OF HIS WORD AND THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM, WE ARE SO-TO-SPEAK "FOUND." IT'S THIS RELATIONSHIP, THIS FELLOWSHIP, THIS "PARTICIPATION" THAT FILLS ST. PAUL WITH SUCH JOY IN OUR TEXT FOR TODAY—THE SAME JOY WE ALSO ENJOY THIS MORNING THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR.

OF COURSE, MANY PEOPLE DO NOT *FEEL* THE NEED OR ARE NOT *AWARE* OF THE NEED FOR SUCH A RELATIONSHIP IN THEIR LIFE. THEY DO NOT REALIZE THEIR LOST CONDITION. THERE ARE ALSO

THOSE WHO REALIZE ALL-TOO-WELL THEIR "LOSTNESS," SUCH AS A YOUNG CHILD LOST AND SEPARATED FROM HER MOTHER IN THE CONFUSION OF A CROWDED SHOPPING MALL. THERE ARE ALSO THOSE WHO SEEK TO FILL THE VOID OF "LOSTNESS" IN THEIR LIFE BY SEEKING SATISFACTION IN THE WRONG PLACES, FOR EXAMPLE, LOT, THE NEPHEW OF ABRAHAM, WHO CHOSE THE RICHES OF THE VALLEY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH FOR HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY—AND THEY ALMOST LOST THEIR LIVES; JUDAS ISCARIOT, WHO GREEDILY PILFERED MONEY FROM THE MONEY BAG OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES AND FINALLY BETRAYED THE LORD FOR THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER; AND ANNANIAS AND SAPPHIRA, WHO SECRETELY KEPT A PORTION OF THE PROCEEDS FROM THE LAND THEY HAD PLEDGED TO THE LORD FOR THEMSELVES. THE SIN AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS OF OUR HUMAN NATURE KEEPS US FROM TRUSTING IN GOD AS THE SOURCE OF OUR DAILY LIFE AND FROM LIVING A SATISFYING LIFE AS HIS BELOVED CHILDREN.

WHEN WE REALIZE WE ARE LOST, WE ALSO MUST RECOGNIZE THE HOPELESSNESS OF OUR LOSTNESS. GOD'S WORD TELLS US THAT WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES. WE NEED HELP FROM SOMEONE ELSE. BUT FROM WHOM? WE ARE LIKE THE MARINE FIGHTING IN KOREA WHO WAS INTERVIEWED BY A FEMALE WAR CORRESPONDENT. ONE DAY, IN THE DEAD OF WINTER, THE CORRESPONDENT CAME ACROSS HIM SEATED ON THE GROUND, EATING RATIONS OUT OF A TIN CAN. HE HAD BEEN ON THE FRONT LINES FIGHTING A RED CHINESE ARMY

THAT OUTNUMBERED THE AMERICANS TEN TO ONE. HIS BODY WAS SLUMPED FROM LACK OF SLEEP, HIS EYES WERE BLOODSHOT, AND THE MOISTURE ON HIS BEARD WAS FROZEN. SHE WALKED UP TO HIM AND ASKED IF SHE COULD GIVE HIM ANYTHING. HIS ANSWER WAS SHORT AND SIMPLE: "GIVE ME A TOMORROW."

JESUS CHRIST GIVES YOU AND ME A TOMORROW. BY THE LAW, HE GRABS US BY THE NAPE OF THE NECK, SHOWS US OUR SINS ACCORDING TO HIS WORD, AND LEADS US TO REPENTANCE. THEN HE CALLS US BY THE GOSPEL TO FOLLOW HIM AS HIS DISCIPLES. BY GRACE AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE TO WALK WITH GOD IN EVERYTHING WE DO. WE'RE NOT JUST VOLUNTEERS, COMING AND GOING AS WE PLEASE. THAT'S NOT THE LASTING RELATIONSHIP THAT GOD ESTABLISHES WITH US BY THE SAVING ACT OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS. BY MEANS OF HOLY BAPTISM AND HIS WORD, WE ARE UNITED WITH CHRIST, AND GOD BEGINS A GOOD WORK IN US—THE WORK OF SALVATION, THAT IS, TAKING US FROM A DANGEROUS SITUATION—ETERNAL CONDEMNATION—AND PUTTING US IN A PLACE OF SAFETY—ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST. THAT GOOD WORK OF GOD IS BASED SOLELY ON THE GOOD WORK OF JESUS CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY, PAYING THE FULL PENALTY FOR OUR SINS. NOW, BY THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GOD KEEPS US IN SAFETY THROUGH FAITH IN HIS SON UNTIL HE SHALL COME AGAIN ON THE LAST DAY.

THUS, HAVING BEEN SOUGHT AND FOUND, WE NOW SEEK TO GROW UP IN THE LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT CHRIST GIVES US THROUGH THE WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. WE GROW AS WE SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, SEEKING MORE AND MORE KNOWLEDGE AND DEPTH OF INSIGHT INTO THE MARVELOUS RELATIONSHIP GOD ESTABLISHES WITH US IN CHRIST. WE GAIN THIS UNDERSTANDING FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ALONE, FOR, AS JESUS SAYS, "IT IS [THE SCRIPTURES] THAT TESTIFY OF ME" (JN 5:39). AS WE SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES, WE ASK JESUS, "HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?" AND HE REPLIES, "THIS MUCH," AND STRETCHES OUT HIS ARMS AND DIES (MT 27:32-50; MK 15:21-37; LK 23:26-46; JN 19:16b-30). THROUGH THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD, GOD GIVES US THE GREAT GIFT OF HIS LOVE. THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS AS OUR ONE-AND-ONLY SAVIOR, WE RECEIVE THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE FRUIT THAT COMES FROM CHRIST ALONE, PRODUCED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT ALONE—TO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD ALONE.

NOW WE HAVE GIFTS TO SHARE WITH OTHERS: GIFTS OF LOVE, GIFTS OF JOY, AND GIFTS OF PEACE. THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH, GOD GIVES US THESE GIFTS—AND MORE—AND WE MUST DELIVER THEM, ESPECIALLY THE GIFT OF THE MESSAGE OF FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION—OF PEACE WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. AS THE HOLIDAYS APPROACH, WE WILL BE REMINDED TO GET OUR GIFTS OFF TO OUR LOVED ONES IN

A TIMELY MANNER. WELL, WE NEED TO GET OUR GIFTS OFF TO THE LORD IN A TIMELY MANNER ALSO, AS ST. PAUL SAYS, "ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, EACH ONE OF YOU SHOULD SET ASIDE A SUM OF MONEY IN KEEPING WITH HIS INCOME. . ." (1 COR 16:2).

SO OFTEN IN OUR LIFE, HOWEVER, WE FIND OURSELVES NOT DOING WHAT WE KNOW IS THE LORD'S WILL, NOT GETTING OUR GIFTS TO HIM. WE ARE SO OFTEN LIKE THE DELIVERY BOY DRIVING A MOPED WHO STOPPED AT A RED LIGHT ONE DAY BESIDE A BRIGHT AND SHINY NEW CORVETTE. "GREAT LOOKING CAR," HE SHOUTED. THE DRIVER OPENED THE PASSENGER DOOR SO THE MOPED DRIVER COULD LEAN OVER AND EXAMINE THE INTERIOR. JUST THEN THE LIGHT TURNED GREEN, THE DRIVER SLAMMED THE DOOR, AND HE SPED OFF. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE MOPED CAUGHT UP WITH HIM AND PASSED THE SPORTS CAR. QUICKLY THE CORVETTE ACCELERATED AND PASSED THE MOPED. THEN THE MOPED ZIPPED AHEAD AGAIN, TURNED ON A DIME, CHARGED BACK TOWARD THE VETTE, AND FELL OVER. THE SPORTS CAR BRAKED BESIDE THE BIKE, AND THE DRIVER OF THE CAR ASKED THE DRIVER OF THE MOPED IF HE WAS HURT. "NO, BUT THANKS FOR ASKING," THE DELIVERY BOY REPLIED. "WELL, IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU?" ASKED THE DRIVER OF THE VETTE. "YES," ANSWERED THE MOPED DRIVER. "CAN YOU PLEASE OPEN YOUR DOOR AND RELEASE MY SUSPENDERS?!"

LIKE THE DRIVER OF THE MOPED, WE CAN SO EASILY GET CAUGHT UP IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD UNAWARES—THINGS TEMPTING TO OUR EYES BUT DEADLY TO OUR SOULS. LIKE THE SEED PLANTED IN THE FIELD, IT'S SO EASY FOR THE THORNS AND THISTLES OF LIFE—THE WORRIES OF LIFE AND THE DECEITFULNESS OF WEALTH—TO CHOKE THE NEW LIFE OUT OF US, MAKING US UNFRUITFUL (MT 13:22). BUT THROUGH THE REGENERATING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE SET FREE FROM THE POWER OF SIN AND ENABLED TO LIVE OUR LIVES TO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. WE CAN "FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH," AND "THROW OFF EVERYTHING THAT HINDERS AND THE SIN THAT SO EASILY ENTANGLES." WE CAN "RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR US" IN GOD'S WORD (HEB 12:1, 2)—BACK TO THE FATHER THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, AND TO A TRULY SATISFYING RELATIONSHIP ONCE AGAIN.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH SAID IN ONE OF HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESSES, "WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO GIVE. SO, IF YOU KNOW HOW TO READ, FIND SOMEONE WHO CAN'T. IF YOU'VE GOT A HAMMER, FIND A NAIL. IF YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY, LONELY, OR IN TROUBLE—SEEK OUT SOMEONE WHO IS." AT ONE TIME SIN, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL HAD US BY THE THROAT, BUT CHRIST CAME AND SET US FREE FROM THEIR CONTROL. UNITED WITH CHRIST BY FAITH, WE NOW OFFER

OURSELVES TO GOD—OUR LIVES, OUR GIFTS, AND OUR
POSSESSIONS—ALL TO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF HIS HOLY NAME.
CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE
LOST (LK 19:10). AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SOUGHT AND FOUND
BY HIM, LET'S SHARE THE GIFTS WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN BY GRACE
WITH OTHERS—WITH GREAT JOY. AMEN.