

The stirring hymn we just sang, “Rejoice, O *Pilgrim* Throng” always reminds me of Thanksgiving. In fact, I can practically taste the delicious turkey and scrumptious mashed potatoes right now. Those are my favorite parts of the thanksgiving feast. By the way, do you know what the favorite part of the thanksgiving meal is for a taxidermist? The stuffing! Back to the pilgrims though, do you know why pilgrims always kept always having to pull their pants up? Because their belts were on their hats! Okay, seriously, getting back on subject, our sermon hymn was not speaking of those kind of pilgrims, the ones who set sail to America on the Mayflower in 1620 and wore funny looking belt-buckle hats! What the hymn *is* saying is that: **All** of us believers in Jesus are pilgrims. We truly are on a pilgrimage, a journey, making our way through life on this Earth to our real home which is in heaven with the Lord. That explains stanza six where we sang: **At last the march shall end; The wearied ones shall rest; The pilgrims find their home at last, Jerusalem the blest.**

Jerusalem here means “heaven.” Until we get to our home in paradise we journey onward in this world as God’s pilgrim people.

So, here we are on *our* journey five and a half weeks before Thanksgiving on a Sunday morning. Sunday marks the beginning of another week of our pilgrimage. Now, how does *that* make you feel? Do you look forward to this new week with excitement? Are you eager with anticipation about the possibilities of what a new week brings?

Or is it the opposite, are you really *not* looking forward to the week ahead? Maybe the events that took place this past week brought some serious trials and hardships into your life. If so, then the journey that lies ahead this week may not seem so exciting.

Feelings of excitement or not, the fact is we don’t know what this coming week will bring us on our journey. We don’t know today what physical or mental pain we will suffer before the week is over. We just don’t know what joy that may come into our lives during this upcoming week. Even though we don’t know what lies ahead, this morning we are going to see that with God we can *always* face the new week with *confidence*.

But we cannot begin any week with confidence without first looking back over the *past* weeks, months, and years and being grateful for all the blessings that we have received from our Creator. As the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians his thoughts went back to the past. He thought about the time he began the congregation there at Thessalonica and how God blessed them with the gift of faith. Paul thought about how God had

blessed **him** by allowing him to be the shepherd of His flock. And as Paul thought about the past he did so with gratitude. He wrote “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.”

The gratitude Paul felt in his heart, he expressed to God in prayer. As Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he also expressed his thankfulness to God for all the blessings God had graciously poured out on him. It’s the same for me, and I am sure also for Pastor Adelsen. I am very thankful to God that He has allowed me to be one of your Pastors and I thank God for you in my prayers.

As we think back on all the events so far in our lives, we really do have a lot of reasons to be thankful. We’re grateful for all that God has done for us in the past. For giving us a family, a home, a house, a job, a school, a church. We’re thankful that He has provided us with **all** that we need for body and soul. He has watched over us so that no harm or danger overtook us. He has been with us through good times and bad. He has given us strength and encouragement when things looked grim and we felt ready to give up. These are just a few of the many reasons we have for looking at the past with gratitude in our hearts.

In this letter to the Thessalonians, Paul talks about two reasons in particular for being grateful. The first is our election. Paul says, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has **chosen** you.”

And God has chosen you, too! This is something that should fill a person with confidence like nothing else as we begin each week. Before you were born, before God created the world, in **eternity** He chose you to be His own. God looked at all that He would create, the oceans, the continents, the mountains, the trees, and the whole universe and decided that creation would not be complete without you!

What’s even more God elected you not only to physical life but to eternal **salvation** through His Son Jesus Christ. God made the choice, you and I didn’t. We didn’t influence His decision in the least. How could we? We weren’t even around back then. In fact, because of who we are as sinful human beings, we’re opposed to God and to all that God has done for us. Our sinful nature wants nothing to do with God. That’s why we **would** not and **could** not choose God. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight, Ephesians 1:4. It was God Who out of His great love for us chose us to be His own.

In our Old Testament reading for today we heard how God is in control. He used Cyrus, the non-believing King of Persia for His divine purpose to deliver His people out of captivity and back to Israel. Having chosen us for salvation God brought us to faith. Just as with old King Cyrus, God is in control

of our lives, too. What's more, He saw to it that we were baptized and His Holy Spirit created faith in our heart. He has that faith nourished through His Word and Supper. It is our faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ that gives us the confidence we need to face each week.

Our election is first reason Paul lists for us to be grateful and to be able to face each week with confidence, the second reason is our **conversion**. The text describes our conversion like this: "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."

The word conversion means a change. A change has taken place in our hearts. This change came about through the gospel. The gospel, which is the good news of salvation is enormously powerful. The Bible calls the gospel "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

The gospel alone has the power to change the sinful human heart. God's gospel has the power to make a believer out of an unbeliever. The gospel has such great power because there the Holy Spirit is at work creating and sustaining faith. It was the Holy Spirit who created faith in our heart causing our conversion.

The result of our conversion is the deep-seeded conviction that what the God's Gospel says is the truth. The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts to accept what He says – in other words we have the confidence to say, "God says it, I believe it, that settles it." That's faith. That's trust.

That strong belief of which Paul speaks is made even stronger for whenever we come to the Lord's Table and receive Christ's true body which is given in the bread and His true blood which is given in the wine. Hearing and believing the words "Take eat, this is My body given for you. Take drink, this is my blood poured out for **you** for the forgiveness of sins!"

It's because we can know without a doubt that our sins are forgiven in heaven that we have the confidence to face each week on earth. We can face this week with boldness when we remember all that God has done for us in the past and knowing this, we will find joy in being God's children. Because of what God has done for us we know without a doubt we are His children.

We take all our cares and worries that would prevent us from facing each week with confidence and Jesus removes them. He carries our burdens and removes our guilt so that we are spotless in God's sight. God took away the guilt of sin and provided for our salvation when He allowed His Son to be nailed to the cross. Because of what Jesus has done for us we have the confidence to face another week.

We have this confidence because of the love God has poured out into us. And it's God's love that fills us that then pours out to those around us. Paul wrote, "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

We're eager to serve God and His people because of the faith He has given us produces love. The love that comes from God and fills us will then overflow to those around us. And there are so many ways for us to show God's love to others. Whether it's helping someone who is grieving or listening to someone who is hurting. Being there to listen and to share God's peace are just a couple of ways that faith will show itself through labors of love. Faith fills us with the love of God. God's love for us instills in us a love for others.

As Christians we know God is in control and that He works out all things for the good of those who love him. We know that no matter what happens this week, we can face every day with confidence because our eternal salvation has been taken care of by our loving Father in heaven. As we head out to continue our pilgrim journey this week, we can be confident that while we live and work for the good of God's people around us, He is there providing for our earthly needs, too.

We can face this week and every week with great confidence no matter what may come our way. Since God is for us ***nothing*** can stand against us. May God to continue to pour out His blessings to you as you go your pilgrim way until we reach our promised land in life everlasting!
Amen.