

## Advent 2017

### Week three

#### Wednesday, December 20

#### *Give Thanks In All Circumstances*

#### **Prayers for candle-lighting**

The true light, which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world.

*[Light three candles]*

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,  
my whole being shall exult in my God.*

The true light, which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world.

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:16-22**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

#### **Interpretation**

This passage, from the earliest book in the entire New Testament, contains some of the most practical advice in the scriptures. The first line, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances," can sound as though it is just whitewashing over the very real suffering and grief that many of us encounter in life.

- But over time, I have experienced the way in which some of the things I have most not wanted to happen have turned out to be good teachers for me.
- I am not saying that God caused these experiences*, but that because God was with me as I walked through them, I was able to learn things about myself and others that are very valuable to me now.
- So I have learned to rejoice, to pray, and to give thanks for pretty much everything, this whole risky business of living and loving. The last line reads literally, "hold fast to what is good; distance yourself from every form of evil."
- The apostle Paul, who gave this advice to the church in Thessalonica, was used to communities full of people who didn't agree on every detail of their belief, and wanted Paul to settle their disputes by making it clear who was right and who was wrong.
- Occasionally Paul would do so, but frequently he gave advice more like today's passage: *test everything; hold onto what proves to be good, and get far away from things that prove destructive.*

- We live in a contentious age, when many people are divided from one another by beliefs and opinions that they hold. I think Paul would tell us not to worry so much about the ideas that others have, but to watch their actions. When their lives are creative and life-giving, draw near; when their behavior is destructive, steer clear.

### **Reflection**

Which experiences in your life have been the most significant teachers for you? Were all of these experiences good ones? How would you pray in thanksgiving for some of the harder learning experiences of your life?

This passage is well known for Paul's advice to "pray without ceasing." Some early Christians interpreted this advice to point to the repetition of a short prayer that has come to be called the "Jesus Prayer": *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. Those who pray this prayer carry it in their mind always, letting it seep into their consciousness, making their every breath a prayer.

But others interpret unceasing prayer to be the simple practice of giving one's full attention to whatever is happening at the moment, as an offering of oneself to God, moment by moment. How will you choose to "pray without ceasing"?