

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran
Church
Sermon by Pastor
Anthony E. Schultz
January 15, 2017
2nd Sunday after the
Epiphany
WELS Series B.**



2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 Stand Firm

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. ¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Dear children of our Heavenly Father-precious in His sight for Jesus' sake:

August 21-1920 a little baby was born in London. The parents thought it was going to be a little girl – but they were wrong. At first they thought they would name him Billy – but then thought that sounded too informal. So the dad picked one name – the mom picked another – thus the little boy was named Christopher Robin Millne. This little man couldn't say Millne – he

said, “Moon” – so around the house they called him Billy Moon. On his birthday Christopher Robbin got a stuffed bear. Christopher Robbin named his bear Edward! Christopher had lots of toys – stuffed animals. He had an Eeyore, Piglet, Kanga, Roo, *Owl and Rabbit were imaginary*. And the ever bouncy Tigger! It might be tempting to think, “I wish my parents were so clever and creative – as to think up something like Winnie-the-Pooh. I wish I was literally Christopher Robin! I would be rich and famous and *popular*? The fact is – Christopher Robin was not popular. Fact is – his classmates teased him all the time. They would quote his father’s books. They’d say, “particularly from the poem *Vespers*: “*Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares! Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*” Christopher Robin hated it. He *hated* it! Sometimes life is not easy. We have troubles and problems and frustrations. This is nothing new! Two thousand years ago – life was not easy as people in the city of Thessalonica waited for Jesus to come back on Judgement Day to take us home to Heaven! Today God’s Word is again Law and Gospel. Always Law first – it reminds us of our crushing load of sin and guilt. Then the Gospel points us to Jesus’ \uparrow and empty tomb. Then and only then – does the Gospel empower and enable us to bear fruits of faith – as we wait for Jesus to bring us home to Heaven! As we wait for Jesus to come back on Judgment Day *God’s Word* says,

Don’t Worry While You Wait!

- I. **We have reason to rejoice**
- II. **We have nothing to fear**

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on – is part of the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the believers in the city of Thessalonica. I have thought for a long time – how convenient it

would be to say as Prof. Scharf often did, “Work with me at the map!” – as he taught Ancient Roman History and Reformation History. Look at the map – and see where the city of Thessalonica is. *The People’s Bible* volume **Thessalonians** – available from our Northwestern Publishing House – or available from our Church Library – has in the back pages – maps showing the Apostle Paul’s missionary journeys. Prof. Kuske – one of the most faithful workers on the WELS Catechism – often called the *Kuske Catechism* – wrote *The People’s Bible – Thessalonians*. He said odds are – most people don’t know where Thessalonica is. Back in early New Testament times just about everybody did – the same way today everybody knows where Chicago – the newest murder capital of our country – is. Everybody knows where St. Louis is. Like Chicago and St. Louis Thessalonica was a kind of crossroads – a place of business and trade. Thessalonica had almost 10x as many people as Watertown. Thessalonica – think *location, location, location!* It was strategically located – Roman roads – move soldiers quickly – trade – roads and a harbor – Roman navy and shipping – business people – buying, selling, people getting rich – Greek mythology – Mt. Olympus. Often times this is a pretty good recipe for the sinfulness of a Chicago – homicide and organized crime – sin city – a city that never sleeps – a sinful place pretty much like – *Watertown?* A place of greed and materialism – marriage and family under attack – alcohol abuse – people busy living their lives apart from the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. To these people the Apostle Paul wrote two letters of instruction and encouragement!

Context! *1 Thessalonians* begins with the Apostle Paul giving thanks for the Thessalonians! He wrote, **“You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.**

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” 1 Thessalonians 1:6,7 *Severe suffering?!* Do we have severe suffering on account of our faith? My home congregation – where I belonged in High School and College and the Seminary – a congregation named Hope apparently ran out of Hope! The voters voted to sell the parsonage – the Church – all the classrooms – all the parking lot and property – and to disband – to quit – to give up – to despair? How can that happen? How can it be that a congregation take down their sign and lock the doors and quit? What happened? What went wrong? If there are 100 sheep – 100 people so dedicated to loving and serving their Savior – and sharing God’s Word with their neighbors and co-workers – and bringing first fruits – is this not enough to have Hope? If the pastor has to do what’s called tent ministry – the example of the Apostle Paul – to sew tents and sails – to pay for his bread and water – couldn’t it work? If the Pastor had to sleep in his office – or live in a tent – or one of those little houses that’s like a little efficiency apartment – wouldn’t that work? There has to be a way! There has to be a way – before you sell the buildings and give away the baptismal font and quit! There has to be a way! There has to be a way!

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. Firstfruits! When we lived in Dundee we inherited a strawberry patch... Every Spring the strawberry vines would send out little runners. Little white flowers would grow – with a little yellow in the middle. Slowly but surely – little very pale green berries would start to grow – bigger and bigger – they would turn redder and redder – bigger and bigger. And at last the day would come – when there was

one bright red juicy strawberry peeking out from under a green leaf. Pick the berry – wipe it off – call to the house – for everyone to watch as you eat that first strawberry – the firstfruit – the sure and certain promise of many *many* more strawberries to come – because you just tasted the firstfruit! The Thessalonians were loved by the Lord – because God chose them as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying – setting apart work of the Holy Spirit through faith in the truth of the Gospel! Jesus prayed – on the night he was betrayed – prayed for Himself – and for His disciples. John 17 **I have given them your word and the world has *hated* them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.** There are some pastors who read the text for their sermon and then repeat these words Sunday after Sunday--***Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*** As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. John 17

¹⁵ **So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. By word of mouth or by letter! That means hearing God's Word – in Church, in Bible Class, live stream chapel from our Lutheran High Schools! Or by Letter! That's reading God's Word!** Do you read your Bible? Is there a Bible sitting somewhere – anywhere in your home – by your TV remotes – that you can pick up and read? I read the other day that most people spend 2 hours or more – every day – watching TV and about 7 minutes reading anything! That most adults do not read books – start books but don't finish them – almost never ever buy a book! They read texts on their phones – read little memes on their smart phones – but

don't read books. Do you read your *Forward in Christ*? Did you read about all the mission opportunities that are presenting themselves – people literally around the world – who don't want our \$--they don't want missionaries to preach to them – they want someone to teach them so they can shepherd their fellow sheep. There are people in Ethiopia – people in Kenya – people South Sudanese refugees – Hmong people literally by the thousands in Vietnam – who like the man in Macedonia – say/pray – come and share the Gospel so we can grow in faith and share our faith! Do you read your *Meditations*? There are devotions that say again and again – don't be anxious as we begin a new year – with change and danger all around. **Don't be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God!**

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. *Eternal encouragement and good hope – encourage your ♥s ...* Did you watch the news last week – Friday – when there was an active shooter in the airport in Fort Lauderdale, FL? Did you watch that? They showed the same film again and again – police officers and SWAT guys going *toward* the shooter – *toward* the danger – while they warned and waved all the passengers to get out of the Terminals and to safety. People of all ages running toward safety – all the while – talking on their cell phones – a grandpa – dragging a large paper bag and 2 suitcases – bouncing on their wheels! He was hanging on tight to a whole bunch of “things and stuff”! What? His medications? His toothbrush and one of those very little tubes of toothpaste and his jammies? What? What was worth being slowed down – in danger of stumbling and falling – yet hanging on tight to his *stuff*? What

do we hang on to? What's important to us? This new year – what's important to us – we will find time – we will make time to do? Is it important to binge watch the newest series on Netflix – or will it be to read our Bible? Will we make it to Packer Games no matter what the wind-chill – or will it be to worship and come to Bible Class and read about the Reformation – this 501st anniversary of the 95 Theses in Latin? How much time do we have yet? Year and years – even decades – or maybe *not so much?*

Christopher Robin Millne was always very self-deprecating – telling people he was *dim* – because he could solve very complicated mathematical problems in his head – yet would stumble on the simple ones. When Christopher Robin was a little boy he had a tool set and took apart the lock on his bedroom door. He took apart their grandfather clock and reworked it so it still kept time. He took a cap gun and re-engineered it – so it would shoot real bullets. And yet – the one thing most important – he didn't understand nor believe – the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. When Christopher Robin died – it was reported in the newspapers--*The books live on. But in real life Toad is dead; Alice is dead; Peter Pan and Wendy are long flown; and now Christopher Robin, a 'sweet and decent' man who overcame a childhood in which he was haunted by Pooh and taunted by peers, has left without saying his prayers – he was a dedicated atheist – aged 75."* Euan Ferguson, 'Robin's gone, but swallows linger on,' *The Observer*, 28 April 1996, *News*, Pg. 14. Dedicated atheist. What is that? It can't be good. Rather by the grace of God alone may it be said of us – we are dedicated to live our faith and share our faith in the Risen Christ – by the power of the Gospel – through the means of grace. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schatz

