



Pentecost 15

September 17, 2017 – 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: We Are “Supernaturally” Gifted!

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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In the last two weeks, three fierce hurricanes devastated the Gulf States, Mexico and many Caribbean islands; a massive earthquake obliterated towns and villages in southern Mexico, claiming hundreds of lives; North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened to attack the U.S. with ICBMs armed with nuclear warheads thought to be seven to eight times more powerful than the bombs we dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan; radical Muslims continue to terrorize the Middle East and western Europe; militant Buddhists in Myanmar have forced Rohingya Muslims to flee to refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh; a record \$2 billion has been spent fighting western wildfires; and in a recent article entitled, “*A Fierce Famine Stalks Africa*” posted in the *New York Times*, Nadifa Mohamed—a British-Somali novelist—wrote, “Today six million people are at the risk of starvation in Somalia, and another fourteen million in Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen. It’s the gravest emergency since the Second World War, according to the United Nations”

Friends, I think it’s safe to say that “**The end of all things is near.**” And since that’s true, we must be certain that our priorities are in line with God’s priorities. With that in mind, the Apostle Peter writes in today’s text, “**Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.**” Prayer comes first. But for us to pray effectively, we must “**be alert and of sober mind.**” Exactly what does that mean? Soldiers know what it means to “**be alert.**” They must be hyper-sensitive to the sights, sounds, terrain and cover of the area they’re patrolling. The best of them develop what might be called a “sixth-sense” when it comes to detecting danger—whether from IEDs buried beside the road their unit is patrolling or from rooftop snipers strategically positioned to pick them off one by one as the work house to house clearing inner-city neighborhoods of enemy combatants. To “**be of sober mind**” means to be totally present in the moment. It means that you’re armed with the facts and ready, willing and able to act at a moment’s notice.

For us to be “**alert**” to the spiritual dangers that surround us, we have to spend time in Scripture. In the next chapter of this same letter, Peter writes, “**Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings**” (5:8-9). Our fellow believers help us stay “**alert**” to the dangers that might negatively impact our faith in Jesus because they’re involved in the same spiritual warfare we are. We are all “**our brother’s (and sister’s)**

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keeper[s]” (Gen. 4:9) when it comes to seeking the best possible outcome for a fellow believer’s faith and life. That means that as much as we might like to sit on the sidelines and not “admonish” (Col. 3:16) an erring brother or sister in Christ, “love” obligates us to intervene. We can’t say, “But isn’t that the Pastor’s job?” in the vain hope of absolving ourselves of this God-given responsibility. To that end, Peter writes: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

There are three words for “love” in biblical Greek: *eros*; *phileo*; and *agape*. *Eros* is sexual love; *phileo* is brotherly love; and *agape* is self-sacrificing love that puts the needs and interests of others ahead of our own. Jesus’ love is *agape* love. His *agape* love for us and for all mankind—from the dawn of Creation until the earth’s final curtain call—compelled Him to make the most pivotal move in the history of this fallen world. St. Paul wrote of that seminal moment: “But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law [so] that we might receive adoption to sonship” (Gal. 4:4-5). Jesus “redeemed,” or “bought back,” every single soul from their slavery to sin, death, Satan and hell. He forsook heaven’s joys and glories to clothe Himself in human flesh; to walk in our shoes; to endure our temptations; to experience our pain and hunger; to live up to God’s standard of perfection for us because we have not; to suffer in hell for our sins; to die our death; to return to life so that He could ensure our eternal salvation. In *agape* love, Jesus did for us what we could have never done for ourselves—not in a million lifetimes!

So, how do we respond to Jesus’ *agape* love? With *agape* love of our own for the Lord and for our fellow human beings! And when we do, we can expect God to bless our obedience to His commands to love Him above all else and to love our neighbor like we love ourselves. P.J., the last thing you memorized from Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* was his conclusion to the Ten Commandments. Can you share that with the congregation now, so that they can better appreciate God’s mercy, but also His righteous anger against those who refuse to trust in Him?

(P.J. recites Luther’s conclusion to the Ten Commandments)

God punishes the sins of those who disobey Him in unbelief, but He graciously blesses those in whom His Spirit loves and works. That’s truly something we can’t be grateful enough for! Jesus’ *agape* love sets us free from sin’s power and its condemnation in hell, and it motivates us to love others with the very same *agape* love that “covers over a multitude of sins”—not by ignoring them, but by admonishing an erring brother or sister if we see them wandering down the path of sin, and then assuring them when they repent, “the LORD has taken away your sin. You will not die,” just like the prophet Samuel did when King David admitted, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:13). Peter cites another way to

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show *agape* love for fellow believers when he says, **“Offer hospitality to one another without complaining.”** That’s not as easy as it might sound. The kind of **“hospitality”** he refers to is a fruit of *agape* love. We help others without expecting anything for our effort. That way, we won’t start **“complaining”** if they don’t return the favor!

Peter urges us, **“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”** P.J., you, too, have been given spiritual gifts just like every other Christian, even though you may not grasp at this point in your life what your gifts are. So, P.J, how do you plan on using your gifts to serve the Lord in the years to come once you discover what your spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit are?

(P.J. gives his answer as to how he plans to serve God with his life)

Today, P.J. is being confirmed into the confessional, evangelical Lutheran faith. He will make his vows before God and before us, the fellow members of Living Hope Lutheran Church. The promises he makes are serious ones; the ability to carry them out can only come **“with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”** With that in mind, P.J., why don’t you share with the congregation the reasons why you want to be confirmed.

(P.J. gives his answer as to why he wants to be confirmed)

Receiving the Savior’s true body and blood in His Supper also serves to strengthen your faith in Christ. It’s one more way that Jesus demonstrates *agape* love for us. When you were baptized into Christ, you were made a member of God’s family. Today you’ll celebrate Holy Communion for the first time with your church family here at Living Hope! What an awesome privilege! What a tremendous blessing! In closing, I’d like you to share with your fellow members the reason you chose Psalm 119:105 as your confirmation verse. Have at it, Philip James Chaban!

(P.J. shares the reason why he chose his confirmation verse)

Thanks, P.J., for being such a remarkable student of God’s Word the past several months! I really mean that, from the bottom of my heart. I’ll miss having you in catechism class, but I truly believe that you’ll go on to do remarkable things in service to the Lord and to your

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fellow believers. You have a real heart for God and for others. You really do. And even though “The end of all things is near,” we trust that Jesus is still in control, so that “in all things [He] works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). So, “To him”—to Jesus—“be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”