

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

How do you go about doing what you've never done before – like preaching your farewell sermon, as you retire from the public ministry? I would think the best thing to do is to dance with the girl you brought to the dance. In other words, do what you're used to. Stick to the familiar. There are few words of our God that are more familiar to us than the words I've chosen for this occasion – the words of the apostolic blessing that we use at the close of our less formal liturgies, *Morning Praise* and *Evening Prayer*. So sticking with what is familiar – let us be guided by these words of the apostle Paul as I say, ***Finally, Brothers and Sisters, Farewell.*** And as we ponder the huge thoughts in Paul's apostolic blessing, we might say it in another way to one another: ***Finally, Brothers and Sisters, FARE WELL!*** We have every reason to expect that this will be the case for all of us as we hear each person of the holy triune God promise to remain with us with his abiding love. Accompanied by such divine love, how can brothers and sisters in the faith do anything but ***FARE WELL.***

So, sticking to what is familiar, the words of the apostolic blessing permit us this morning to bask in the beautiful gospel message. The focus for each person of the Trinity is different as each one lavishes his love upon us, but in all three cases, what we receive is the joyous gospel assuring us that our wonderful God, this holy trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, have done for us what is necessary for fallen sinners like us to someday enjoy God's heaven.

I've always felt that a preacher is a dying man preaching to those who are dying. On any Sunday the sermon he is preaching could be the last sermon he preaches. The sermon he preaches could be the very last sermon a believer in audience hears. If that is so, then the preacher must be sure that every sermon brings God's people the joyous gospel to assure them that heaven is theirs, and to help them get ready for heaven. May that be the

case this morning again as we bid one another ***FAREWELL.*** What else would a preacher want to say for the last time? And what else would a worshiper want to hear for the last time?

So brothers and sisters of St. Matthew's, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, may the love of our wonderful Father in heaven, may the continuing fellowship and enlightenment and guidance of the Spirit who is one with the Father and his Son from all eternity be with you all. Only as they are with us will we indeed ***FARE WELL.***

1) ***FAREWELL*** in the name of **JESUS**. Farewell in that name he bore on earth when he came to save us with his grace. That name of Jesus that means "Savior" puts all of us in mind of our baptisms when he made us to be his own, and washed us from our sins.

FAREWELL in the name of the **CHRIST**. This name of Jesus refers to his sacred office. He is God's **CHRIST** – God's anointed One. As God anointed him to this office of the **CHRIST** he became the sin-bearer of the world. The true God with all his blessings and gifts cannot be found apart from the person of the **CHRIST**. And God's greatest gift – the gift of forgiveness cannot come to the sinner except through gracious work of **THE CHRIST** as he carries our guilt and sin to his cross, and renders complete payment as our substitute. His cross. He lets us see that cross each time we enter the sanctuary to begin our worship; and he it bring its rich comfort to us again as we leave the sanctuary of God's house. **Brothers and sisters, FARE WELL IN THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.**

2) ***FARE WELL*** in the **LOVE OF THE FATHER**. When Paul thinks of God the Father, the word ***love*** immediately comes to mind for him. In just a few months after writing these words to the Corinthians Paul would describe the love of God in his letter to the Romans. He would write: **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Brothers and sisters, **FARE WELL IN THE LOVE OF GOD THE FATHER.**

3) And finally, brothers and sisters, **FAREWELL**. . . in the fellowship of the **HOLY SPIRIT**. The Spirit is the one who brings us into fellowship with Jesus, and through that fellowship with Jesus, into fellowship with one another. It's a most fitting thing for Paul to close his letter with this mention of the fellowship worked by the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit working through the gospel who had brought the Corinthians out of heathenism and formed them into a Christian fellowship, just as he has brought us out of unbelief into the fellowship of Christ's church and into the fellowship of St. Matthew's. It is a most blessed fellowship that leads us to confess that we are saved by faith alone, with no contribution on our part whatsoever; that we are saved only by the grace that God showed us in his Son Christ Jesus, and that we are saved only in the way God reveals to us in Holy Scriptures. And it is a fellowship that leads us furthermore to confess that God works this saving faith in us only through his gospel in Word and sacrament, his means of grace. A people who share such a fellowship and confession will most certainly **FARE WELL**.

I find it incredibly instructive to note that these words of farewell that have come to such prominence in the Christian church and its worship were spoken by Paul to only one of the many congregations that God had him serve. And these words were spoken by Paul in saying good-bye to the congregation that arguably gave Paul his greatest challenge in ministry. There were huge issues that had to be addressed in the Corinthian congregation. The answers needed to deal with those issues made it necessary for Paul and congregation to search the scriptures hard and long to come up with the divine guidance to get God's people out of this Corinthian muddle. But pastor and people grew in the process of searching and mining God's Word.

But that's the way life is. Our bonds, our relationships only grow stronger as we go through adversity together and as we grow through adversity. It's that way on our team, isn't it, my dear wife Lee Ann? Our personal relationship is all the stronger for the tough things we've had to muddle through together. You are all the more precious to me because you have stood staunchly at my side and have been a support and an encourager for me as I muddled through the work of ministry.

My dear sons, David, Paul and Chris, each one of you is especially precious to both of us too, because we have had to muddle through tough stuff together. Things were different and unique to each one of you. But wouldn't you agree that the bond of loving family only grows stronger as we work through the tough stuff together.

So it doesn't surprise me that the congregation with so many difficulties becomes the object of the apostle's greatest love, as he bids the congregation farewell. And it doesn't surprise me, family of St. Matthew's, that we have similar feelings as we bid you farewell.

We have gone through some tough things together. In fact, it seemed that whenever any of you in this family made an appointment to discuss something in my office, it wasn't so that you could share with me your most recent joyous experiences or your most rewarding successes. No, it was at times when you needed help – God's help. That's why you came, and that's what you received – God's help. And I think that's what kept you coming Sunday after Sunday after Sunday too. God's help is what you will continue to need, and God's help is what you will continue to get – as Pastor Schultz continues to minister you with God's holy precious Word, law and gospel.

So, good people of St. Matthew's, **FAREWELL**. May you all **FARE WELL**. And you will all **FARE WELL** as you continue to enjoy the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as you continue to enjoy the love of God our Father, and as you continue to enjoy the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. May you all **FARE WELL** under the grace and blessing of our beloved, holy triune God.

Amen.