

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

Third Sunday of Advent: December 14-16, 2024

Smith

The Peace of God Guards Your Heart

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanks-giving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What is the peace of God? The peace of God is first of all the actual cease of hostility between God and man. A century ago, there was a day in November of 1918 when all of the nations at war in World War I agreed that at Eleven o'clock in the morning they would stop fighting, the guns would stop, the bombs would no longer fall, the deadly mustard gas would no longer be released, the biplanes and the blimps would land; the soldiers and sailors would lay down their guns and go home-- all of the fighting would come to an end. One minute the roar of artillery was still blasting away, and the next minute? Peace.

This happened for us spiritually on that Friday in the springtime when the Son of God let himself die for our sins. God's wrath, his holy, righteous, and deserving wrath was done because justice was satisfied. "Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness," but blood was shed.

Why would that act satisfy the requirements of the Almighty Maker for your sin and mine? This is why when we teach religion (and we covered this in Catechism class just two weeks ago) that in the Second Article of Creed we are reminded that this Savior of ours is and had to be both truly God and truly human. Human, so that he could and would be born like us, under the requirements of God's law for mankind. And Jesus was "born of the virgin Mary." Human: he cried, got hungry and thirsty, slept, ate and drank, set aside some of his Almighty power so that he could be harmed, and was also tempted in every way just as we are, and was able in the end to die. And did. He bled, he hurt, he suffered, he got weaker and weaker, and died.

And in addition to be human, Jesus Christ was and is truly God. This means that his very blood is divine. His flesh shares his divinity just as his soul shares his divinity. This is not taught correctly in many Christian churches that fail to see the importance of the two natures of Christ our Lord. But the human nature of the Son of God is just as completely his human nature as his divine nature is completely his divine nature. He is both and at the same time, forevermore, but man and God. He did this for our sakes, and took on a human nature while

retaining his divine nature, so that what we might say of the Son of God we can say of Jesus Christ. When his blood fell during his punishment and death, it was God's own bleed that fell. His blood fully atoned for and covered our sins.

So God's wrath has ended with the suffering and death of Christ on the cross for all mankind, and received by his people through faith in Christ. At the same time, man's hostility toward God is destroyed as a light destroys darkness by the kindling of faith in man's heart, especially when we come to faith through the sacrament of baptism but also each time we confess our sins and receive forgiveness.

This peace comes to us through the sacraments and through the preaching of the gospel. It is spoken from one Christian friend to another; from a mother to her children, from a father to his whole family. This peace is another word for the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, from the impulse of God in eternity to send his Son to be our Savior, to the incarnation of the Son of God as a man in order to be able to physically suffer and die, and so that as true God that sacrificial death would be sufficient to atone for the sins of all mankind forever

“Like a guard or sentry, it stands guard over our hearts and thoughts so that nothing will disturb them.”^a “So great is the peace of God in our hearts that in every trouble and every struggle we are so far from being overcome by fear that we even rejoice, as Paul says in Romans 3” (LW 20:25).

It sounds as if we could understand this peace. So in what way is it beyond our understanding? Not that it is beyond our comprehension; the Scriptures tell us again and again and at great length how God has brought about this peace in Christ Jesus. And all of us know its sweetness from our own experience. What “surpasses understanding” is in regard to our hearts and minds. The Christian does not depend on his mind to fend off worry. That's the best that the world can hope to do. But what “exceeds the mind” is the gift of Christ, which is simply there whether it is fully understood or not. Whatever harasses us, whatever attacks us, we have Jesus, always Jesus, who has given us his peace.

We damage and disrupt this peace when our own human nature, which unlike the one Jesus has, ours is a sinful nature, and we let our sinful emotions get to bubbling on the stove of our heart. Anger, revenge, lust, rage, jealousy, mistrust, doubt, laziness. But worse than all of these is the human habit of the person who wants to justify himself for whatever he's done. He sins against his wife or his family or breaks the law of the country, and he tries to wriggle out of it by finding some excuse. Does that satisfy anyone? If he even tries to apologize, but

^a RCH Lenski

doesn't change his behavior and keeps on doing what he's been doing, what will happen? Nobody will trust him anymore. They won't let him get away with it. And now do we see how God feels about our sins? We sin, we break his holy law, and then we have the gall to try to wriggle out of it with our pathetic human excuses? Isaiah was right when he said, "A human being has got nothing but breath and wind in his nostrils. He is of no account" (Isaiah 2:22).

Is this why God sent his Son? Because we are so foul, so sinful, so hopeless, so helpless? It would be better to say that God sent his Son to save us simply because he loves us, for his own reasons, and that is how he overcame all of our foul, sinful, hopeless and helpless needs. God is love, and God loved us so much that he sent his Son to be our savior. To bring us peace.

Our hope in heaven surpasses the understanding of the ungodly, but it also surpasses our own human understanding. Yet we trust in it, just as we trust that the drops of blood that fell onto the cross, drop by holy drop, covered our sins and cured us of our unbelief, our despair, our confusion, our rebellion, and that the blood of Jesus also covers over and forgives all of our miserable attempts at good works so that we know that we are truly healed instead by Jesus alone.

Sometimes end our sermons with this passage. I don't know when this practice got started, but I've been hearing it for more than fifty years, and you've heard it at least from me for half of that time at least. And what a good reminder it is that God's blessings are more than we expect, more than we can sometimes understand. God wants us to expect only good things from him. Therefore, we should strive not to put God to the test. If you are troubled with sadness or loneliness, don't tempt God by isolating yourself from the world. God created the fellowship of the church even before he instituted the fellowship of marriage. He wants us to have companionship, the love of family and friends. He wants us to hear is message of comfort and he wants us to get it, to not miss the meaning. He told us in our lesson today: "Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, for the Lord has taken away your punishment" (Zephaniah 3:14-15).

This blessing is beyond our understanding, but it's no magic trick. It isn't an illusion. It is truly done through the blood of Jesus our Lord. He came into the world to rescue YOU. Don't doubt that or forget it. Since he gave you that, the best of gifts, he will surely keep on giving nothing but good. Amen.

And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.