

Sermon on **Philippians 4:4-7** – 1st Sunday in Advent 11.30.25
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

As Christians, we run from some things. Scripture tells us to flee temptation, sexual immorality, sins of the youth, and the like, but where are we fleeing too? David often spoke in the Psalms of the Lord God being our refuge, our fortress, our rock of salvation. Advent reminds us to run to our King in repentance and hope, like the Palm Sunday worshippers ran to praise Him. We soon celebrate the coming of the King in the manger at Bethlehem. In our Lord we find joy and peace because of what he has done.

The King Comes! Rejoice!

- 1) Rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance.**
- 2) Run to the Lord in every circumstance.**

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Our experience tells us it isn't easy to rejoice. The apostle Paul wrote this letter from prison. In chapter four, right before we read these verses, Paul pleads with two sisters in Christ to get along in the congregation at Philippi. Life isn't easy in the world, and even in the church. It's easy to get down in a world that hates Christ, and in a family of believers that is a mixed bag. Add in some anxiety especially when we can't fix the world, nor can we physically change others though we might like to do so. Jesus told us, *"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* Jesus warned us that this is the reality. Trouble is, we often think we can fix the world, or at least fix it to benefit ourselves, make it a little more heaven on earth. I have tried it. God in his mercy sometimes allows difficulty, difficulty too great to bear, too great for me to fix or figure out. It's a humbling thing and I don't like it. In fact, I complain and pout sometimes and blame others, even

underhandedly blame God. Paul had more against him even in that moment than I've ever had to deal with, yet Paul says *"Rejoice."* How? Our sinful first thoughts may be taking offense at God for allowing us to suffer or complaining, but Paul shows that's not the way it has to be. Our King has freed us from that way. That's the old way – everything all about me, and how it impacts me. If Paul thought like we often do, he would say, *"Woe is me."* But he says, *"Rejoice...in the Lord."* Christian, you are in the Lord as Paul is. You have a King who loves you, has saved you, and rules over all for you. He is bigger than any problem you face. He has delivered you from far greater things and made you an heir of God. Trust him. **Rejoice in the Lord.** Live knowing that you are *in the Lord* – not afraid, not withdrawn, but bold to serve.

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." Not only do you rejoice, but you also have the privilege of serving on his behalf. It's a striking thing to the world when you serve someone, when you take the time for the downtrodden, listen to someone who you shouldn't have the time of day for and respond carefully, patiently, and lovingly. Following your King you are willing to put yourself out, suffer even, or give up something for another – whether that is time, pride, health, money, glory, time. That's not the way the world works. It's a dog-eat-dog world, but you seek the good of your neighbor. What is the key to this for us?

It's him – the King of Kings who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing what lay ahead – rejection, pain, suffering for sins not his own, and yet he went anyway. He didn't run from it. He ran to it. He served, yielded his life, not as a helpless weakling, but the King of glory with all the power and might, laying down his life because he knew who he was, what he had come to do, and he loved even his enemies, even you. He gave all for your forgiveness.

As followers of this one – blood bought, baptized believers, we have a higher status in him than this world can afford or earn or even understand. It is a gift from him. We do not give that up or cheapen that when we are gentle with others, suffer for the good of others, even our enemies. It gives us joy. Why? *The Lord is near.* We know what he brings – heaven,

eternal life, no more pain, sorrow, hurt. We are willing to let go of the things, the money, the honor, the power, time, even ourselves as we follow him, our King. So, as we prepare to celebrate his birth, we **Rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance. Run to the Lord in every circumstance.**

A man once asked me how fast you have to run to outrun a bear. I said I didn't know. He answered, "just a bit faster than the guy next to you." As Christians you might sometimes feel like the slower guy – open season for hurt as you don't act like the world – being an outcast, looked over for a promotion, not in the "in" club when you flee from sin. What do we do when we feel the pressure of this life within or without? Paul says, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*"

Anxiety can be crushing. Worry can click our brain on at 2:00am and 4:00am when we could really use the sleep. We know the troubles, the problems in our lives, in our bodies, in the world, and we try to figure out a way, a solution, or busy ourselves trying to drown it all out. We don't have the answers, but God doesn't say we have to. In fact, he knows we don't. He is King. He is our Creator and Savior. He tells us to stop and turn to him. In every situation talk to him, ask him, thank him. Don't keep mulling it over in your head. Present it to him like a child excited to show mom or dad their artwork from school or rushing at first opportunity to tattle on their sibling. God knows. God wants you to come to him in good and bad. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father." His promises to us are "yes" in Christ. Our answers are always answered in a way that is best – for us now or for us eternally, and therefore both. "*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?....if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" (Luke 11:11ff). **Run to the Lord in every circumstance.**

Paul gives us confidence, "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" We live in a world of preventative maintenance. We Scotch Guard our furniture so liquids roll off. We get air tags for our wallets or cars in case lost or stolen. We

check credit scores or order identity theft protection. We know the number 9-1-1 often before we know any other. We are always afraid to lose. But in our King we have a peace, God's peace which he gives to us, a peace the world cannot fathom and cannot know and will not experience outside of him. It exceeds and transcends our feeble attempts to keep peace in this life. God gives this peace to you *in Christ Jesus*. Your King came to save you, to pay for your sins on the cross, to rise from the grave, to ascend, to rule for you, and he will come back. In him you have peace, not a peace you have to protect, but a peace that protects you. The peace God gives *guards your hearts and your minds*. It kicks out anxiety, fear, and all that threatens you. This peace is yours.

Advent is about getting ready for the King to come. We repent and confess our selfishness, worry and fear. He forgives our sins. He takes our problems and worries from us. He helps us through, guards our hearts and minds so that no matter what the circumstance or difficulty, good things or bad, we can rejoice not in an empty worldly treasure or pleasure feeling, but in a joy born that comes from our King, a peace God has given which permeates our lives, enables us to be gentle like our King, and knows the victory has been won and he comes soon to bring us to enjoy it fully. **Rejoice! Your King Comes. Rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance. Run to the Lord in every circumstance.** "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" Amen.