Church of the Lutheran Confession's

Ministry By Mail

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17

1st Sunday in Advent

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Scripture Readings

Romans 5:1-11; Matthew 21:1-9

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941)

#59 V: 1-3, 5-6| #58 V: 1, 2, 4, 7 | #61 | #58 V: 3, 9

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Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, You sent Your Son to bear Your wrath for our sins and bring us peace with You. Quiet our hearts with Your love, and grant us the sure comfort of sins forgiven, that we may rejoice at His coming and await His return without fear. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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Sermon Text

(Zephaniah 3:14-17 NKJ) "Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. 16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. 17 The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.""

Theme

What is Peace?

Dear fellow redeemed, beloved of God,

What is peace? That is a surprisingly hard thing to define. Can someone who has never been through war really know and appreciate peace? Not really. So is that the key? Do you have to have gone through war to know what peace is? Well, that doesn't quite work either.

I once heard about the effect World War II had on children in France. Children in France had it really hard during the Nazi occupation. But something interesting—and sad—was discovered after the war. The children who were old enough to remember peacetime mostly recovered and appreciated the peace that followed. The children who were too young to understand what was happening did just fine, too. But the children between those two age groups did not do well. They could not appreciate the absence of threats and gunfire. They could not appreciate peace even when it came. They had learned to stay on edge. Even when the danger was gone, they still expected that they might be shot at or see a loved one killed in front of them.

The same thing is often true for those who have been verbally or physically abused over long periods of time. Peace for them means being free from the abuser and from the fear that the abuse might return. It means they can finally stop living on edge.

We do not truly know peace until we have been through hell, have been freed from it, and are certain we are safe from it. That is the peace our Savior came to bring us. That is the peace we wish for ourselves and others. We wish them peace in body and mind, and most of all, we wish them peace in their souls.

One definition of peace I especially like describes it as the tranquil state of a soul that is assured of its salvation through Christ and therefore fears nothing from God and is content with its earthly lot. That is the peace we proclaim to the world as ours in Christ.

Truly, we will not have complete peace until we are in heaven. We will see God judge those who did not love the Lord's coming, and we will know clearly that we were saved from that fate by grace alone. We will know beyond any doubt that because of Christ we have been rescued forever. We will never worry about that again. In heaven our souls will be fully assured of eternal safety. We will fear nothing and be happy with everything. That will be peace. Our Savior came to remove every danger and give us the assurance that we are safe forever.

And yet, part of that peace is already ours. By faith, our souls can be tranquil, assured of salvation in Christ and free from fear. In Christ, we need not fear bombs, bullets, or sickness, because by faith we know that Christ is in control. In Christ, we need not fear the bogeyman of tomorrow, because Christ rules all things. Most of all, our souls can rest in the assurance of salvation because Jesus came to end our war with God. That's right—we were at war with God, and Christ came to end it.

I'm sure you have all seen pictures from the end of World War II. When peace was announced, people jumped, laughed, kissed, and sang. For many, it was the happiest day of their lives. Our text also speaks of the end of war. It is God's prophecy of peace. In the opening chapters of Zephaniah, the prophet proclaims that God will bring war and destruction upon Judah. God is righteous, and the people of Judah were sinful and refused to repent.

Zephaniah warned them again and again of what would happen if they did not repent, and they did not. God brought war, famine, and devastation upon them. Yet God also promised that a time would come when He would end His war with them by sending a Savior. They would turn to Him in repentance, and this Mighty One would save them from God's wrath. Yes, God would send a Savior to rescue them and bring the war to an end. God's wrath would cease. His people would sing, dance, rejoice, and celebrate. In this promised Savior, they would be assured of forgiveness and peace, no longer fearing judgment. Their souls would be tranquil, and they would be content with their earthly lot while looking ahead to heaven.

Do you have that peace? We should, because the same promise is ours. Thanks be to God, we have been spared the depths of rebellion and the severity of judgment that Jerusalem experienced. Yet we have felt God's wrath at times. Every one of us has fallen into sin. Each of us has resisted repentance at times, choosing our own way over God's. Guilt and discipline followed.

King David understood this well. He wrote of feeling God's hand heavy upon him and of the blessed relief that came when he confessed his sin and God forgave him. That is peace—the peace of sins forgiven. It is the peace of knowing that God's wrath is no longer directed against you. When we know that because of the Mighty Savior, God looks upon us in love, we have peace.

That Mighty Savior is Christ the Lord. Because He paid for our sins on the cross, God's wrath has been stilled. The Lord has taken away our judgment and cast out our enemy. Because of this Mighty One, we have no reason to fear.

The peace the angels proclaim at the birth of our savior is the tranquil state of a soul that is assured of its salvation through Christ and therefore fears nothing from God and is content with its earthly lot. To get ready for Christmas, reflect on what it would be like to still bear God's wrath. Then rejoice, knowing that Jesus, the Mighty One, bore that wrath for you and paid for your sins in full. Now we have peace. We are free in Christ and need never fear God's wrath again.

"Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!" The LORD has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The LORD your God is in your midst. The Mighty One will save. "He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

That is peace. Amen.

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

Pastor Aaron Ude

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Rapid City, SD

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