

**THE CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE MIDST OF GRACE**  
**WE REJOICE, FOR THE LORD IS NEAR**  
**I. Rejoice in the Transcendent Reality**  
**II. The Nearness of Christ Instills Grace**  
**III. Prayer + Faith Gives Peace**  
Philippians 4:4-7

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020 | ADVENT  
**FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

*Old Testament*     Isaiah 40:1-8  
*Psalm*                 Psalm 92  
*New Testament*     Philippians 4:4-7  
*Gospel*                 John 1:19-28

***COMMUNION***

**GRANTS PASS & MEDFORD**

Divine Service, Rite Two, ELH p. 60  
The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 59 Lord of All Hopefulness  
Chief Hymn – ELH 590 O Happy Day When We Shall Stand  
Distribution Hymn – ELH 123 From Heaven Above to Earth I come  
Closing Hymn – ELH 110 vv. 1, 5 O Come, O come, Emmanuel

Faith & Our Savior Lutheran Churches  
Medford & Grants Pass, Oregon  
Edward L. Bryant, Pastor

Philippians 4:4–7 (CSB)

**<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

Dear fellow redeemed: I have been grouping the texts for this advent season under the heading, "THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDST OF GRACE." As Christians we live in awareness of something that the world doesn't see, that is seen only by faith, and that is the undeserved, unmerited love of God for us, because of Christ.

Paul's situation as he writes this epistle is a living example of it. He is in prison, falsely accused, and just one legal misunderstanding away from losing his head, literally. But ... Living in God's unmerited love, because of Christ, we can rejoice in any circumstances, knowing that the Lord is near and will save us.

## **THE CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE MIDST OF GRACE**

### **WE REJOICE, FOR THE LORD IS NEAR**

#### **I. Rejoice in the Transcendent Reality**

#### **II. The Nearness of Christ Instills Grace**

#### **III. Prayer + Faith Gives Peace**

#### **I. Rejoice in the Transcendent Reality**

Now first understand that this is not the bogus self-help advice that many make it, as in "Don't worry! Be happy." Some would have you believe that you aren't really a Christian unless you are on an emotional high, whatever happens. That's absurd! What about Jesus' anguish in Gethsemane, pleading to be spared the cross? Not a good Christian was he? What about Paul writing in his second letter to Timothy, "***For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close.***" (2 Timothy 4:6, CSB) Didn't he get this memo?

We see the kind of rejoicing Paul is talking about in his final imprisonment. "***At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. ... The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.***" (2 Timothy 4:16–18, CSB) He says that in his first hearing before the court nobody would stand up for him. He predicts that this case will end in his death, and his entry into heaven.

So the rejoicing Paul talks about deals with reality, not with mere feelings. There is a joy in knowing that even in death we have life. In this you can rejoice. In a similar context, Paul sums up the perspective of the Christian. "***For we walk by faith, not by sight.***" (2 Corinthians 5:7, CSB)

Our sight is limited in that it cannot see ultimate truth. Take the crucifixion of Christ. What did Jesus' disciples see? The death of their friend, lord, teacher, mentor- the death of the One they hoped to bring in some kind of kingdom on earth. But by faith they could have seen the Lamb of God taking away the world's sins. They could have seen in his ascension the ascent to the Throne of David, and His establishment of the everlasting kingdom that is His church. Faith rising from the Word of God reveals the truth. IF they had the eyes of faith, they would have seen the truth.

So Paul can say, <sup>4</sup> **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ... The Lord is near.** He is near as Lord over the universe, as Lord over the nations, as Lord over the church, and as the Lord of life who will return on the last day of this world. He is near in His word and sacraments, and in His eagerness to hear our prayers.

## **II. The Nearness of Christ Instills Grace**

The nearness of Christ bolsters our faith in His grace. There are many ways Scripture speaks of His nearness to us. He promises, "... **And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:20, CSB) "... **He himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you.**" (Hebrews 13:5, CSB) In fact, He dwells with us in what we call the mystical union, "**Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."** (John 14:23, CSB)

Again, this isn't some sort of vague exercise in "feelings." Christ's presence isn't something we find inside ourselves; we find it in our baptism, in the Lord's Supper, and in His word. And what do all these reveal? The unmerited love of God for you- His grace.

In your baptism, Jesus joins with you in His death and resurrection to atone for your sins. "**Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.**" (Romans 6:3-4, CSB)

In the word of God He assures you of your forgiveness so that, "**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,**" (Romans 8:1, CSB)

In His Holy Supper He reminds us that He is not with us just individually, but as a church, "**The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, since all of us share the one bread.**" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, CSB)

He is near to us to forgive us, and to shine through us to the world, as Paul says, <sup>4</sup> **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** <sup>5</sup> **Let your graciousness be known to everyone.** The Lord is near.

## **III. Prayer + Faith Gives Peace**

Again, the nearness of Christ is not something we see, as such, but something we know by faith that the Holy Spirit instills through His word. The faith that receives and trusts in Christ's forgiveness responds in prayer and finds peace in His promises. **Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

That's a pretty tough expectation, isn't it? "Don't worry," when our very body is created to respond to danger with the fight or flight response. Jesus sweat like blood over what lay ahead of him. Here's the thing: We aren't talking about normal physical reactions here, but our soul's peace. This is peace that is "beyond all understanding." It is peace that is there even when our mind and body are in turmoil.

Let's say you leave the doctor's office after the biopsy, waiting for the results. Cancer.

Let's say you suddenly lose your sense of taste and get short of breath.

Let's say the government announces another restriction on your business that threatens your livelihood.

Let's say that you get a letter from an attorney threatening suit.

You can probably imagine a half-dozen anxiety/worry – producing scenarios.

First remember with thanks the times you have been rescued from disaster, the times you got well, paid your bills, found a job, and so on. Then with thanks speak in your petitions to our Savior, with your heartfelt needs and requests. And remember He is near with His promises. His promises aren't that your life will be without trouble, but that in this dying world, there is a promise of resurrection and everlasting life. He answers prayer, so things may all go well (clean bill of health, paid bills - - - or not. Paul prayed for deliverance from Nero's hate, but things didn't start out well, and he concluded, ***The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.***

This is the **peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, and will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.** It isn't the peace of a Pollyanna who cannot endure calamity, but it is the peace that stands guard over our hearts and minds and truly makes sense of this world for it is rooted in the truth God gives us in His word.

For contrast, just think of a sign we see around lately. "IT WILL ALL BE OK." It's about the year 2020 in general and COVID in particular. For the unbeliever that is a pretty empty declaration. Will it all be OK, or will you get sick? Will you die? And if this life is all there is, then what hope is there? There are all the dreams unfulfilled, all the regrets left over, and all the guilt to burden the heart. What peace is there?

But as Christians we have the peace promised by the One who died our death for us to atone for all our guilt, who rose from the dead to defeat death, and who ascended into heaven so that He could be near each one of us, speak through His word, hear our prayers, and deliver us from death to life. There is true peace that is by faith, and it is there even when we are in trouble and turmoil, the peace that surpasses all understanding.

So then ... **<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

AMEN.