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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 16, 2018
3rd Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Zephaniah 3:14-18, Luke 1:39-55
Hymns: 62; 69; 90; 96:1,3

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our coming Lord, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Advent preparations --

The idea of Advent preparations brings some very different pictures to one's mind than thinking of Christmas preparations. Christmas preparations we think of stringing lights, setting up the tree, shopping for gifts, shopping for food, baking, cleaning, decorating, mailing some Christmas cards, and while we are doing all these

things we tell Alexa to play some Christmas music. When I think of all these things I do think happy thoughts, but also maybe some stressful thoughts.

Now think of advent preparation. What comes to mind? John the Baptist, repentance, spiritual introspection, maybe looking for the end of the world. Somber thoughts indeed!

Think “Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming!” Ok, think it one more time: “Jesus is coming!” Think of Jesus coming to Bethlehem, born of the Virgin Mary, born in a humble stable. That’s not somber. That’s “Joy to the world!” Think of Jesus entering into my heart with the blessing of forgiveness and God’s tender love. That’s not somber; again that’s “Joy to the earth, The Savior Reigns!” Now, finally think of Jesus coming to bring me to my heavenly home! Somber? NO, not at all! That is “**fullness of Joy!**”

Christmas preparations can be joy filled times made up of many family memories and indeed are wonderful ways to express our joy in knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior, but too many in this world, even too many Christians have slipped from the deep spiritual joy that is ours in Christ, to the superficial joy that could describe any holiday where we get a day off from work and gather with friends and family.

So it is that this morning we will consider with the Spirit’s guidance some very special --

THEME: Advent Blessings.

The Apostle Paul was writing this epistle to the Christians in Philippi to thank them for their kindness and love which they had demonstrated toward him. In this positive letter Paul strikes this tone that they should live in joy just as Paul himself was living in joy.

I. Christian Joy --

is the first of the advent blessings we consider this morning. It was Paul's desire that the Christians in Philippi, and of course by extension all Christians to our very day, that we should rejoice, really live with joy in our hearts to the Lord. I know what one might think, "That's easy for Paul to say, he wasn't dealing with the kind of problems or distress that I am dealing with in my life." And you're right. Paul was very likely dealing with far greater burdens than you or I know. This is after all one of the letters written by Paul as he was being held prisoner in Rome. While he was under house arrest and people were allowed to come and see him, and tend to his needs, he was under armed guard, and he wore shackles. He was in chains. He was awaiting trial before Caesar.

It was with a heart filled with joy that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians and encouraged them with these words: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* ⁵*Let your gentleness be known to all men. **The Lord is at hand.***" (v.4,5)

To the world, to our own human reason as well, it seems almost silly to tell someone to rejoice always. Always? Aren't there times of sadness in every life? Aren't there times of distress, pain, tribulation? Of course there are! Paul was experiencing just such a time when he wrote to the Philippians. Paul didn't say, "Rejoice no matter what." He didn't call for senseless frivolity as one might find with late night TV. Paul says, "**Rejoice in the Lord.**" It is in connection with our faith in Christ Jesus that we are enabled, by the Spirit to live in joy and rejoicing even when we are facing trials that are emotionally upsetting. We know that even in our most troubled moments the Lord is present with us and watching over us. We know that He abides with us in love, a love that was demonstrated to us by God sending His Son into the world that we might live through Him. In the worst of times this truth concerning the advent of our Lord is a constant in our lives that cannot and will not be taken from us. Our

hearts always know, ALWAYS know the joy of salvation that has been given to us in Christ.

The advent blessing of joy and rejoicing comes to us as Jesus enters our hearts through faith. It is faith that lays hold of the love of God. Faith assures us that God is not dealing with us according to our sins, and that no matter how bleak the outlook is for this life, the outlook for eternal life is bright and clear. **Rejoice!**

From this rejoicing flows a Christian attitude for life that the world really doesn't understand. In our text it said "*let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*" (v.5) "Gentleness" doesn't really cover what Paul was saying. To that gentleness one might add graciousness and consideration for others, a willingness to yield to one's adversary, even when you know that you are in the right. This is what Jesus was talking about when He said, "*To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.*"

(Luke 6:29)

The world sees that as weakness, and an opportunity to take advantage of the child of God. Many would do just that. But they are wrong about this being weakness. It is really strength, strength that is found in the knowledge that "*the Lord is at hand.*" There is that advent connection again. Yeah, they may take your coat and your cloak, and you may be chilly for a time, but even as you know that the Lord will provide for you, you also know that since the Lord is at hand, coming soon to receive us to glory, the petty issues of this life, are just that, petty. They are nothing when compared to the joy and the life we are anticipating in the Lord's coming.

When we lose sight of the Lord in our life, when we lose sight of the wonder of grace that we possess in His birth in Bethlehem, in His making a home in our hearts, in His imminent reappearing, then we will go through life

grieved and aggrieved. But when we live with the awareness of faith, the awareness of the Lord's advent as we live our lives, then yes, we rejoice because we have that joy of salvation that cannot be taken away from us.

From that joy comes yet another Advent blessing --

II. Peace!

So often instead of peace we experience anxiety, worry, sleepless nights, angst, always wondering how are things ever going to work out? This is when we need to recall the message of Advent and the blessings that come to us because of the Lord's advent. Again remember that the Apostle Paul was awaiting trial before the Roman emperor when he wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi. He didn't know if he would be set free to continue his gospel ministry, or be put to death. He didn't fret about it. He knew "to live is Jesus, and to die is gain." Paul possessed that peace that comes to all children of God because of Jesus' advent into this world, into our hearts, and finally in the end to take us to Himself. It is from this heart of faith that Paul wrote these words of our text:

Philippians 4:6-7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

We do know how things are going to work out. Really we do. We know that as redeemed children of God we will ultimately be delivered from this veil of tears and be with the Lord in heaven above. So in the meantime don't be anxious about things. I want to say don't be so anxious, because I experience anxiety in my life all too often. Sometimes it just gets out of hand. I guess that means that Paul speaks to me first.

"Be anxious for nothing." Handle things with prayer and supplications. The first word in our text for "prayer" is

our everyday prayers, those prayers that should be and are a part of everyday life for the child of God. We say our table prayers. We ask for the Lord's blessings on our day. We ask for daily forgiveness. We ask for a blessed night's rest. We ask for the Lord to help along the way during the day. We say thank you to the Lord when we didn't have that car accident. This prayer is the flow of communication from the Christian heart to our Father in heaven. We speak or think prayers of adoration and praise and thanksgiving.

But then we meet the challenges of the day. For a student it may be a test, for adult it may be a special meeting, a doctor's appointment; for a pastor a difficult call that needs to be made. Don't fret! Pray! The second word is supplication, indicating that special petition to the Lord designed for that specific set of circumstances that lies immediately before us.

"Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." (The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1)

Take it to the Lord with the understanding that He is coming soon, that He has come for our salvation, that He abides within our hearts, and shall never leave us nor forsake us. (Deuteronomy 31:6) We are left with the blessing of peace.

You have heard the closing verse of our text hundreds of times at the conclusion of the sermon many Sundays, and special services as well. You see it's the gospel of God's love and forgiveness that brings us His peace. That message must lie at the center of every sermon or it isn't a proper sermon. And when that message is faithfully brought to you the Spirit of our God brings this peace into your hearts. This peace abides with you as you make your way home and face the challenges of daily life with its problems, with its temptations, and afflictions, and also with its sins. The Advent blessing of God's peace abides

with you and guards your heart against the despair of doubt and unbelief. The advent blessing of God's peace assures you day after day that when we "*confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" God is faithful to forgive. God preserves us in His peace as we abide in faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This peace passes our ability to understand because the grace of God that lies behind this peace is beyond anything we could imagine. This peace guards our hearts against the devil's lying accusations and even our own conscience's false stirrings. "*If our heart condemns us God is greater than our heart and knows all things.*" (1 John 3:20)

So this year let us remember just how special our advent preparations are as we anticipate another Christmas observance. The blessings we gain from Advent preparations are far better than Christmas cookies. Knowing "*the Lord is at hand*" brings us true and lasting **joy and rejoicing** even in the face of this life's greatest challenges, and **peace** that transcends any peace known or originating in man. Peace is ours because Jesus Is Coming, indeed He is with us now and forevermore.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.