

“Perfect Peace!”

Dear Friends in Christ,

If I asked you tonight what people pray for the most, what do you think would be on the list? What’s on your prayer list tonight? Would there be significant differences between the prayers of the confirmation students and the prayers of their parents? Do age and season of life influence our prayers? Is it present day circumstances, needs and challenges that are on our minds, or are we looking for God to help our favorite sports team win the next game, or make sure we get a good grade in school, or provide some divine intervention when it comes to the next Powerball drawing? Just what is that frames our petitions and do we understand the deeper meaning of our prayers and praises?

For example, one of the prayers always prominent during the season of Advent and Christmas is “*peace*.” It is the “*peace*” candle that we lighted again tonight and we prayed: “*Lord God, source of light, shine in our lives and in your world with your perfect peace.*” Yet, what are we praying for when “*perfect peace*” is so allusive and seemingly impossible in a sinful and fallen world? What did the angel’s mean when singing the great Christmas doxology: “*Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men*” (Luke 2:14, KJV), or as preferred translations render, “*peace among men with whom he is pleased,*” (ESV) or “*peace to those on whom his favor rests.*” (NIV)

“*Peace*” is a very familiar word, spoken and sung often in our liturgy: “*Glory to God in the highest and peace to His*

people on earth.” It is the Pax domini that we speak to one another during every service, sharing “the peace of the Lord be with you always.” It is the traditional benediction that sends us out to serve: “The Lord lift up his countenance upon you [or look with favor upon you] and give you peace.” It was the closing prayer and plea in Sunday’s Christmas Cantata song: Dona Nobis Pacem: Let there be peace!

So what part of “*peace*” don’t we get that we have to constantly be praying for it? Is the word simply too familiar, or so overused and misunderstood that we have given up on true “*peace*?” Has the concept of “*peace*” perhaps become too connected with the absence of earthly conflict, no problems, everybody just getting along, total acceptance and no divisiveness or dividing walls of hostility; no more wars and terrorists attacks? Just what is this “*peace*” of which the angels sing?

Since we’re trying to get deeper into the meaning of some of the words in the Christmas Gospel, I found it interesting that God chose to send His Son “*In those days when Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.*” (Luke 2:1) This is a time in history that is often referred to as the Pax Romana, a time of perceived peace throughout the entire Roman Empire. Caesar thought all was “*hunkey dorey*” and under control, so this was a great time for everyone to “*register*” so that the government could make sure everyone was taxed properly! And we fuss about tax reform today, and it still brings no one any “*peace!*”

But “*peace,*” as the angel’s proclamation clearly reveals, isn’t about taxes or world events or the absence of anxiety and conflict, abuse or oppression. “*Peace*” is not waking up each morning to a “*wonderful day or wonderful feelings, everything’s*

going our way.” No, it’s about the fulfillment of God’s promise to save the world from sin and death by sending Jesus to be Messiah, Savior and Lord! It is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy:

² *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

⁶ *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty
God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *Of the greatness of his government and **peace**
there will be no end.* (Isaiah 9:2, 6-7a)

The Christmas gift of “*peace*” you see, is all about the glory of God being revealed to a people who were living then, and now in “*deep darkness!*” God’s “*peace*” is the declaration of the angels to a people who had been waiting in hope for centuries: “*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*” God’s “*peace*” finds its fulfillment in His presence in this world, we, His children, claiming by faith the promise of His Son to be “*with us always...in everything...despite everything...for unto us was born that day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!*” (Luke 2:10-11) “*He is himself,*” as Paul writes to the Ephesians, “*our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...**through the cross!***” (Ephesians 2:14-17)

Now, please don’t get me wrong, I long for “*peace on earth*” and “*peace in my heart*” as much as anyone, but “*perfect peace*” is not about what happens “*to us*” on this earth. [Now hear that again: “*Perfect peace*” is not about what happens “*to us*” in our daily lives. It’s about what happened “**FOR US!**”

That's why Jesus said to His disciples: *"My peace, I give to you. My peace I leave with you, not as the world gives, give I unto you!"* (John 14:7) It is the assurance of a perfect, everlasting outcome for all who place their trust in Him! This is the *"peace that surpasses all understanding"* - that God would love me, that God would love you, and that *"God would love the world so much that He would to send His One and only Son!"* (John 3:16)

So, here's the gift of *"peace"* which I try to claim by faith every day in my walk through this wounded and broken world: *"It's all gonna be OK!" "It's all gonna be OK!"* No matter what happens down here to me or to you - as hard and as unfair as life can be - we can trust and believe in the everlasting promise that *"nothing in all creation can separate us from his love...neither death, nor principalities, nor powers...not anything!"* It's the miracle of grace, the gift of faith, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit that assures us of hope and joy, forgiveness and peace through Jesus Christ, the Best of the Best, the Newborn King, our Redeemer, Savior and Lord! It is promise fulfilled because His name is *"Emmanuel"* meaning *"God with us...God for us!"*

So when we find ourselves all upset, fretful, worried, overcome, anxious, worked up, negative, pessimistic, whining, complaining, fearful, hurting, doubting, disappointed, conflicted, guilty, struggling, sorrowful and wondering how in the world we're going to make it through the day...remember the angels who proclaimed: *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests!"* And, *"my, oh my,"* how God *"favored"* us sending His Son, Jesus Christ to save us from our sins!

Perfect peace – remember it’s not about what’s happening “*to us,*” but what God has done “*for us!*” It’s all about focus and faith and that’s why most Lutheran pastor’s pray at the end of each sermon: “*And now, may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in this faith, to life everlasting.*”

Now you know what’s on my prayer list. “*The peace of the Lord be with you always. And also with you!*” Let’s share His peace with each other...