Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. You have heard that phrase again, and again, and again. It is called the votum and is pronounced upon you by the pastor at the end of the sermon. Why?

Because the Word of God bestows what it declares. The word of Christ gives peace, a peace which surpasses all understanding. It is said at the end of the sermon, for a proper sermon will have cut to your heart with the law, laying bare before your eyes of faith, your sins. It should have brought you to your knees, by faith, in repentance saying, “yes, those are my sins, I am ashamed of them, I pray Lord, have mercy on me, and forgive me.”

Unfortunately, that is not always the response to God’s law in the sermon. Oftentimes, people get angry at the law in the sermon, or more correctly, they get angry at the pastor for faithfully speaking God’s law in the sermon. By nature, people do not like it to be pointed out to them that they are so sinful that they are helpless to fix the problem. Most people want guidance on how to fix their lives, not tell them that they are helpless and in need of a Savior.

**Peace Which Surpasses All Understanding**

**Philippians 4:4-7**

Rorate Coeli – 4th Sunday in Advent

11.18.2022

If Law does not show us our sin and make us realize how vile, unclean, unholy, and sinful we are before God, then what God has done in Christ Jesus makes no sense. Without a proper understanding of who we are according to our sinful nature before God, why the Creator took on the form of His creatures will never be appreciated. If we do not comprehend the severity of our sin, that birth we will celebrate next Sunday has no purpose, it is just the birthday of another child. If He was not born fulfill the law perfectly as we miserably fail to do, and then sacrifice that sinless life to purchase forgiveness for us, then why would God leave His throne and endure such anguish at the hands of His creatures?

Only after the Law has done the work of exposing sin and tearing open hearts so that they crave good news, that the Gospel is proclaimed. The Gospel is what God does for man. The Gospel is what God has done – and still does – for us. God does all that is necessary to bring about a new life – a life lived in the forgiveness that the only begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ, has purchased and delivers to us in the forgiveness of sins.

The Gospel is given to you so that you might have peace, so that you no longer worry about your sins. What is phenomenal about the Gospel is that when you truly live in it by faith, you have true peace. In the Gospel, you no longer worry about your lives, how you have to keep the Law.

Does that mean we no longer have to keep God’s Law? Of course not! But if you live your life worried about the Law, and am always thinking, “How must I love my neighbor? Which neighbor must I love? What must I do to love God?” Then you live your life***in* constant worry**. That is not peaceful! That life has you closely watching every move you make, “Am I doing it right? Is it good enough? Have I done what I need to in order to keep God happy with me or am I in danger of suffering His wrath? Have I done enough to get into heaven?”

Dearly beloved of God, that is no way to live! That life has no confidence! You and I ***want*** to be able to say we have done our part. We don’t want to feel beholden to anybody – even God. That is often why the faithful preaching of God’s Law and Gospel is so often offensive. We want to rely upon ourselves, but there is no confidence in us, and certainly no peace.

We know how we have failed and so we want to do better, we want to get ourselves right before and with God – that’s why we’d like the pastor to give us some guidance. That is what many people think a good sermon ought to be, but it isn’t. The purpose of the sermon, the purpose of the Lord’s Supper, the purpose of Baptism, the purpose of our gathering for worship is to receive the Gospel. And the Gospel is all about God, making you right with Him by giving to you, peace – God’s peace.

How many arguments have you had with loved ones as you get ready for Christmas? A joyous time of year, but the stresses of wanting the ‘perfect’ Christmas bring disagreement and conflict into even the closest of families. How many relationships at work, with friends, and of course with some whom are neither, are broken. They are broken because of our sinfulness and the sinfulness of others – our impatience, our over-zealous expectation, and countless other sins, get in the way of healthy relationships.

You want the Law to help you fix that? OK, here it is, “Knock it off! Love everybody in your life – even your enemies – forgive them and be nice to them always. Don’t argue with your spouse! Don’t argue with your parents! Do not badmouth your boss, your pastor, or your neighbor behind their back. Read your Bible every day! Pray at least 30 minutes every morning and every evening – and before and after every meal.”

So, do you think you can do all that? I cannot! If you cannot, and you want to rely upon your keeping the law, then you are left only with God’s wrath against your sinfulness.

This is where the Gospel comes in. The Gospel leaves “me” out of the equation in regard to my status before God. It leaves what I have done and failed to do out of how I become right before God.

My dear friends, you are the redeemed of God. Today is the last Sunday of Advent. You are preparing to rejoice in the Advent of the Babe of Bethlehem, come to set His people free. In one week, we begin that celebration of His birth. But it isn’t just one day that we get to celebrate. We celebrate Christmas, the birth of our Savior, and we celebrate our new condition. Christmas is the wrapping up of God’s gift of forgiveness, life and salvation to mankind in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. We do not celebrate for just one day – it is the state of our new life in Christ – our **whole** new being.

On Christmas, you will again hear the tale of the angel’s visit to the shepherds keeping watch over the flocks at night. In heavenly splendor the angel appeared, and the shepherds who had faced down and chased away predators come to steal their sheep, trembled – they were terrified because they knew that if heavenly glory was there that night, they did not deserve to be left standing. So the angel spoke to them.

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”" And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and ***peace*** on earth good will toward men!” (Luke 2:11-14)

Did you hear it? The Child born that night came to bring peace from God, toward men. Do you understand this peace? Does it make any sense that God would give up His throne, glory, dominion, power, and might to take on the form of the creature and be born of such humble means? Do you understand why God would allow His creatures to mock Him, spit upon Him, strike Him, beat Him, whip Him, and then crucify Him?

He endured all this so that you, and all mankind, might be forgiven. He does it so that you might have peace with His Father and join Him eternally in His kingdom.

You receive God’s peace today for the Lord is at hand. Christ is at hand. Christ comes to bring you the peace which He purchased for you. The Gospel delivers it to you. You do not need to rely upon yourself. You never have to wonder if you have done enough to make God happy. You haven’t! But, Christ has! And what Christ has done He gives unto you. Your sinful self-reliance is forgiven. Your broken relationships healed.

It has been declared to you that your sins are forgiven – in Christ’s Word, they are. The authority which makes that declaration true, is the blood of Christ, shed for you. You have peace with God, a peace which surpasses all understanding.

God peace which surpasses all understanding is yours. You are right with God, able to stand in His presence without fear on the last day/ You live with confidence for you are new creatures, redeemed in Christ Jesus. That is the confidence of faith which trusts the work of Christ. Peace be with you. Amen.