

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent  
December 18, 2022  
“A Christmas greeting from God to you!”  
(Romans 1:1-7)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 4th Sunday in Advent is from our epistle reading, Romans 1:1-7.

**“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;**

**7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:**

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**  
Here ends our text.

Have you received any Christmas cards in the mail this season? It’s become more and more popular to send digital e-cards to one’s computer or phone these days. Greeting cards in general are in decline as people use snail mail less and less and give as a reason the saving of trees.

Yes, an e-card is nice. Any card is nice to receive because it shows that someone was thinking of you and wanted to share a message of love with you. Of course, saving trees aside, it’s always nice to physically open an envelope, hold in your hands an actual card, look at the beautiful artwork and Christmas message and see the actual ink that the sender penned the message with. And, then it can be displayed in the house for all to see. I’ve heard of some in our congregation who make their own Christmas cards and that gives them a uniqueness and personalization that is treasured by the recipient. The cards are saved and looked at again and again over the years.

Today's epistle to the Romans, dictated by Paul, handwritten by Tertius and delivered by Phoebe as Paul says in chapter 16, is indeed a treasured letter which has been read over and over by many, including you and me this morning.

*“Luther said, “it is the chief book of the New Testament and the purest Gospel, which is well worthy that a Christian should not only know it by heart, word for word, but daily use it as the daily bread of the soul; for you can never read and study it too often and too well, and the more you use it, the more precious does it become, and the better does it taste.”*

Wow! Not only can you see, read and touch God's Word but as Luther says, “the better does it taste”. As Psalm 119:103 says, **“How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!”**

And your sweet greeting card from God this morning is summarized by this short phrase **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Your greeting from God extends two most precious gifts to you – grace and peace Grace – God's undeserved favor in Jesus Christ and peace –the happy result of the possession of grace and mercy. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. His redemption has removed the cause of strife, the Father is reconciled to us.

But before we look more closely at God's grace and peace, you may be asking yourself, but where is my name on this greeting card. I see that it was addressed to believers in Rome 2000 years ago. But what does that have to do with me?

Well, Paul tells in the opening verses that the Gospel, the Good News in Jesus Christ, is for all people.

**Through Him (that is Jesus) we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,**

Paul was called by God as we know on the way to Damascus in a most dramatic way to be an apostle of the Gospel, **“separated to the Gospel of God”**, for the purpose of bringing the nations to the obedience to the faith in Christ! And then Paul says to the believers in Rome:

## **6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;**

“You also” – Jews and Gentiles in Rome, the majority being Gentiles are called. That is, you have been given faith to believe. You are beloved of God and you are called to be saints.

So, this greeting by Paul is for all Christians in all nations and “you also” who have been called here in Mercedes are beloved of God and called to be saints.

Even if you don’t receive one Christmas card in the mail this year, this is the most precious greeting that you continually receive from God Himself!

And, indeed we need this uplifting greeting, don’t we? For often we don’t feel beloved by anyone, much less feel like we are saints.

In fact, Paul reminds us in chapter 3:23 of Romans that **“For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**

The sinfulness of this world is so pervasive and apparent that even football players put a message on their helmets to try and curb it. *“End Racism, Stop Hate, It Takes All of US, Black Lives Matter, Inspire Change”*. Those are the messages that you will see on the back of the players helmets. And this year, they added a new message which I see a lot of the players have, *“Choose Love”*.

It's sort of an oxymoron, a contradictory statement when you see these players with “Choose Love” on their helmets who then choose to bash another players as hard as they can! Is that how you show love? ...not to mention the fights that break out when tempers flare.

Yes, the world recognizes that there is a problem. Yet, sinful man’s choosing to love another can never solve it. For sinful man’s love is imperfect – yours and mine.

That’s what sets this letter, this greeting in our epistle lesson apart from all other phrases. For it is God’s love that comes to us in and through His Son Jesus Christ. Hear our text again.

**“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the**

**seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”**

God’s love, promised of old, which separated Paul from his sinful life to exclusively share this Gospel, concerns God’s Son Jesus! He was born in our flesh according to the seed of David. True man. And Paul doesn’t go into all the details that we say in the Creeds, but we know what that means. Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for our sins. He humbled Himself to death and took upon Himself all our sins. That’s the Gospel!

And then Paul tells us that Jesus powerfully rose from the dead because Jesus is true Holy God! His sacrifice was accepted. God’s wrath was stilled and because Jesus rose from the dead, you too will rise again! That’s the full picture of your Christmas greeting!

You know yesterday, if you were watching the Viking/Colt football game, you witnessed history. Down 33-0 at halftime, it looked very bleak for the Vikings to win the game. But they came back and made history with the greatest comeback of all time, winning 39-36. As exciting as that game was, that is not the greatest comeback by a longshot.

For you see, Jesus was dead in the tomb. It looked bleak. The disciples despaired. Jesus’ enemies rejoiced. And then the greatest comeback happened when the earth shook, the tomb was opened and Jesus rose again!

This greatest of comebacks God graciously gives to all believers, to you and me, through our baptisms. For in our baptism, as Paul says in chapter 6 of Romans, we are united with Jesus’ death and resurrection.

And Jesus personally gives you this morning His very body and blood. And personally says to you, “Take and eat this is My body given for you. Take and drink this is My blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

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

We are justified freely by His grace Paul says in Romans 3.

**“21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being**

**justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”  
(Romans 3:21-24)**

And we have peace with God – how? Paul tells us in Romans 5.

**“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2)**

Paul was set apart to proclaim this Gospel. God has called you by this Gospel to be His beloved, His saints through faith in Jesus. And this is your Christmas, Easter greeting card which you treasure and read often, and share it often. For this message is not just for the Romans, but for all nations. Send a Christmas card by snail mail, e-mail or in person. And God’s perfect love will change the world. Yes, some wood was used to make this greeting card possible. Jesus died on the accursed tree to pay for the world’s sins. And He rose again three days – the greatest comeback the world has ever seen. Amen

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**