

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 18, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Romans 1:1-7 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God-- 2) the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures 3) regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4) and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. 5) Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. 6) And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. 7) To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Peace and Quiet – where do you go to find peace and quiet these days? There's so much hustle and bustle as people go about their Christmas preparations. The hustle and bustle leads to tensions and frustrations. Normally peaceful and relaxing activities become stressful – fueling that desire for Peace and Quiet.

Peace on earth – it seems like an impossible dream – as we are reminded again when we hear the Christmas messages from service men and women sending greetings to loved ones via the airwaves since they are stationed in distant places – trying to keep the peace for us here at home.

Whether it's personal peace or world peace that we're seeking – it seems like we chasing a mirage. It just isn't going to happen – and yet the angel proclaimed a message of Peace on the night of our Savior's birth: (Luke 2:14) "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**"

And I frequently greet you at the start of my weekly sermons as I did again today with words similar to the last verse of our sermon text for today: **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It seems as if our personal experience and observation is in conflict with the Words of Scripture, doesn't it? But let's look at things from another angle for a moment. When our life is filled with hassles and troubles and turmoil – we can turn to our Lord – with confidence that he will see us through. And when we do that – we enjoy a peace which only he can provide. The very fact that we can turn to the Lord in times of trouble is a reminder of the fact that we are now at peace with God through faith in Christ Jesus. So you see there is peace on earth after all, isn't there?

What we have discovered as we've been talking about our lack of Peace is the fact that our lack of peace stems from sin – sin which has already been forgiven by Christ Jesus. Perfect peace is possible only in a perfect world – like the one we are waiting for. Until then we have the privilege of knowing a peace which the world cannot know. We have the privilege of sharing a peace the world cannot give. As we continue to prepare our hearts for the celebration of the birth of our Savior our sermon text for today provides us an opportunity to review some of the basic truths of our Christian faith as it assures us that

We Enjoy PEACE on Earth – By the Grace of God

1. God's grace sent the world a Savior
2. God's peace comes through that Savior

Christ Jesus is the basis for the grace and peace which we enjoy. Our text reminds us that this grace and peace is revealed to us in the Gospel – which proclaims that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Paul reminds us that the Gospel regarding God's Son was promised by the Old Testament prophets. Our OT lesson for today was one of many prophecies regarding God's Son, our Savior. Isaiah spoke of a child born of a virgin. He spoke of a miraculous birth – the birth of a son – one who would be called Immanuel because he would be God with man. He would also be called: **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** (cf. Isaiah 9:6.

Each of these names reveals to us that the Savior who would bring peace to the world would be no ordinary child. As our text tells us, he was God's son **who as to his human nature was a descendant of David.**

Jesus was fully God in every respect. There is only one God – but this God consists of three separate persons who are identified as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of these persons of the Holy Trinity are separate and distinct yet there is only one God. Our language limits the way that we can talk about the mysteries of the Holy Trinity. When we speak of Father and Son, we think of two different generations – one being older than the other. But there is no difference in age between the Father and the Son – both are eternal. Both always have existed and always will exist.

However as Galatians 4:4-5 tells us **when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5) to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.**

In a miraculous way Jesus added a human nature to his divine nature – becoming both true God and true man. Paul reminds us that Jesus was a descendant of David. These wonderful events are recorded for us in the Gospel accounts about Christ and his birth.

(Luke 1:26-35 NIV) **God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, (27) to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. (28) The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (29) Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. (30) But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. (31) You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. (32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, (33) and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (34) "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" (35) The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.**

Jesus is true man in the fullest sense. That is the only way he could be our Savior and bring us peace with God so that we might enjoy peace now and for eternity. The Scriptures explain it to us in this way: (Hebrews 2:14-15 NIV) **Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- 15) and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**

Because Jesus was a human being, he is qualified to serve as the representative of the human race before the judgment throne of the Father. Since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he was born without sin. The perfect life he lived is credit to us. And the innocent death that he died is also credited to us. We say that Jesus lived and died for us. Because he is true God his life and death counted for every single person.

We are confident of this because Jesus proved himself to be our Savior by rising from the dead. As our text tells us: He **(Jesus Christ our Lord) was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.**

By his perfect life and innocent sufferings and death, Jesus took the curse of the law away from us. He established peace with God for us. Through faith in him, our brother, we are now children of God who enjoy the peace that only God can provide.

We have the peace of knowing that God is our heavenly Father who rules over us, provides for us, protects us, works everything out for our good, and promises us eternal life and perfect peace with our Lord in heaven.

In his grace, God sent the world a Savior – his Son. God’s peace comes to us through that Savior.

In our text Paul speaks of himself as **a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.** Paul freely acknowledges God’s grace in calling him to serve him by proclaim the peace of God announced in the Gospel to the non-Jewish people or Gentiles as they are called so often in the Scriptures. **Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.**

All Christians are recipients of God’s grace, his undeserved love, which moved God to provide full and free forgiveness and peace to us for Jesus’ sake. But we might say that Paul received a special gift of grace when the Lord Jesus himself appeared to him as he was headed to Damascus to persecute the Christians that were there. Jesus appeared to him to call him to faith and to call him to serve as the missionary to the Gentiles – pure grace. Could anyone have been less worthy of this calling? Paul himself explained why the Lord was so gracious to him: (1 Timothy 1:15-16) **Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 16) But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.**

Paul wants us to understand that God’s grace is sufficient for all of us, regardless of the sins of our youth and our many transgressions. Paul’s mission was to proclaim the peace of Christ – calling them to obedience or faith through the Gospel. Faith is sometimes called obedience to the Gospel. Faith also produces a willingness to serve and obey the Savior as an expression of thanks for his blessings.

You and I are numbered among the Gentiles who have been called to peace through faith in Christ Jesus. We are loved by God and called to be saints. The blessing Paul pronounced upon the Romans also applies to us. **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**

We have spoken about God’s grace repeatedly in our sermon for today – God’s grace is his undeserved love for us in Christ. That grace not only offers us peace but it continues to preserve and constantly renew that peace for us – God’s grace and the peace it offers comes to us through the Gospel. But the Gospel was not just intended for a limited group of people. The good news of the Gospel is that a Savior for all has come to bring peace.

Since you and I are at peace with God – we are able to serve the Lord as peace makers. The Apostle Paul explains: (Romans 12:18) **If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.** One of the ways we can live at peace is by not seeking to gain revenge on those who have hurt us – forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Our failures to forgive often cause us to miss out on the peace the Lord wants us to enjoy – in our families, in our congregation and in our society and world.

We often deny ourselves the peace that could be ours by our failure to trust in the Lord for his gracious care. And we often fail to share the peace by neglecting to share the message of a Savior with others. Once again the world is posed to celebrate Christmas. You know that

We Enjoy PEACE on Earth – By the Grace of God and you know that this PEACE will continue for all eternity.

You can share that peace with others by telling them that

1. God's grace sent the world a Savior
2. God's peace comes through that Savior

Amen.