**Advent – Week 3**

**December 15, 2024**

**Agents of Incredible Peace**

**Philippians 4:4-7**

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

**<Prayer>**

We are thinking about being the agents of Christ in the world, centering our thoughts around this one phrase found in John 20:21, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* This morning, we want to particularly focus our thoughts on being agents of incredible peace.

Some of the older hymns reflect on God’s peace so well.

When peace like a river    
Attendeth my way   
When sorrows   
Like sea billows roll   
Whatever my lot    
Thou hast taught me to say    
It is well    
It is well with my soul

Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace    
Over all victorious in its bright increase    
Perfect yet it floweth fuller every day    
Perfect yet it groweth deeper all the way

Thou will keep those in perfect peace    
Whose mind is stayed on Thee    
When the shadows come and darkness falls    
He giveth inward peace   
O He is the only perfect resting place    
He giveth perfect peace    
Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace    
Whose mind is stayed on Thee

There is something about the nature of this peace of God. It transcends all understanding. That doesn't mean it is unreasonable. It simply means it is better than our reasoning. If you have ever been in a situation where you were in despair, you know how your mind can work in circles. Even when you know you should think differently, it is sometimes the case that your mind or your reasoning can't seem to get around it.

Some of you know this peace by experience. You have had the presence of God come to you and bring you peace that was better than what your mind could work out. Others of you have been living in it and didn't even realize it because the peace of God guards our hearts and minds.

The peace of God is not simply reactionary. It is not just when we are in despair that God gives us peace. God's peace is protective and proactive. The word here, translated guard, is the word used to describe a sentinel. Picture in your mind the guard on top of the wall overlooking the city. His eye is keen on the horizon, looking for any approaching danger. As soon as the danger is spotted, he sets off the alarm, alerting the whole city to the danger.

In the same way, God's peace is proactive. Even before danger approaches His peace rules our hearts and minds. It is like the advanced radar systems the military has in place to protect our borders. Long before an enemy would strike us, we would be alerted to the danger. It is like a home alarm system. When there is a break in the perimeter, the alarm goes off.

God's peace for us is set to protect us. Some may think God's peace only comes to you when you are in trouble, but it is there before trouble hits. And so, many of us live with the peace of God, not knowing the trouble that was averted by the early warning systems in place.

Alfred Lord Tennyson pictured this sentinel of God's peace:

*Love is and was my Lord and King,*   
*And in his presence I attend*   
*To hear the tidings of my friend,*   
*Which every hour his couriers bring.*

*Love is and was my King and Lord,*   
*And will be, tho' as yet I keep*   
*Within his court on earth, and sleep*   
*Encompass'd by his faithful guard,*

*And hear at times a sentinel*   
*Who moves about from place to place,*   
*And whispers to the worlds of space,*   
*In the deep night, that all is well.*

You can be misled to believe God doesn't have time for you. You might have even said, “God has more important things to do than to care about what is happening to me.” While we aren't the center of the universe, we need to remember a couple of things.

1. God's love has no limits. It is not as though God has a resource He must allocate in certain measures in order to have enough to go around.
2. God has no time. Since He is eternal, He can work outside of time. So, if you think God doesn't have time for you – well, in some ways, you are right, but not like you think. Since God has no time – He doesn't have to live with our time constraints. We, on the other hand, can only understand God's work in relationship to time, so our perspective is often flawed. It is like trying to understand God's justice from our perspective. There are certain things that are hard for us to understand when we only look at them from a limited perspective of time and justice.

God's peace is the answer to anxiety. Paul writes, “*Don't be anxious ... but present your request to God ... and the peace of God will guard you....”*

Anxiousness needs an answer. You can't simply say to someone, “Don't be anxious.” You have to provide an alternative. God's peace is not the absence of anxiousness; it is the answer to anxiousness and comes through a process.

“*But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* Whatever the situation in our lives, we present the problem to God. There is an appropriate attitude in our approach, “with thanksgiving.”

We tend to deal with our anxiousness by comparing it to the trouble of others. And it comes out like, “I'm thankful my situation isn't as bad as this person's.” But when we are really anxious, the comparison coping mechanism might not work. So we tell God about it with thanksgiving. We aren't comparing our troubles to others but putting our troubles in light of all of God's provisions for us. One of those provisions is God’s peace. You not only have the peace of God guarding you, but you also have the God of peace with you.

H.A. Kennedy wrote, “To share anxiety with God is to destroy its corroding power and to be calmed by His peace.” When we are “in Christ,” we have this peace as a promise.

The Free Methodist Pastors Manual suggests this prayer for the beginning of a funeral, “O Eternal God, our Father, from whom we come and to whom we go, grant us the favor of Your divine presence at this time in our earthly pilgrimage; assure us by Your Spirit that the one we serve, even Jesus, has conquered death and is alive forevermore; enable us to view our temporal lives in the light of the eternal; and so may our spirits grow calm and our vision clear. “

Sometimes, we think of God's peace only in the times of greatest turmoil. I want us to also think of God's peace in the rather mundane things of life. The situation at Philippi is that two women in the church are not getting along. I know you find that hard to believe, but it is true. Paul makes a plea with the two women in this letter.

*I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn’t want his children holding grudges. And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you’re right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans — worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life (Philippians 4:2-3, The Message).*

From this context Paul says, “*Don't be anxious about anything.”* Who do you think might be anxious? Well, it might be Euodia and Syntyche. They have been called out in a public letter to be read to the whole church and told to get things ironed out. You might imagine if I knew of a couple of women in my church who weren't getting along and I called them out in a sermon and told them to get along, that might cause some anxiety. Of course, it also might be Syzygus. He's been appointed as the one to help these two women get along.

The situation isn't the anxiety of death. It isn't the anxiety of a child with cancer. It isn't a financial crisis. There are two people in the church who aren't getting along. In light of other issues, this is a rather mundane issue. But even in the mundane, Christ grants peace.

In many issues of life that cause us anxiety, there is not much we can actually do. If I have a loved one with illness, there's not a lot I can do. But relationships can be healed. And that's an anxiety where the rubber meets the road. Will I bring that to the Lord and let His peace begin to guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus?

So many people are living without this incredible peace. As we close this morning, let’s contemplate for a few moments, listening to what the Spirit of God might whisper to us. What can we do this week to be agents of incredible peace?