

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

Have many times have you heard the phrase “the more things change, the more they remain the same”? We seem surrounded by the forces of change, and it doesn’t always appear to be change for the better. Permeated by uncertainty, unease both in our lives and in the world around us, upheaval in the political and cultural world. So it was in the world of two thousand years ago as well, crowds coming to John to receive a baptism of repentance, as well as some sharp words. And today the third Sunday in Advent, we look forward to the celebration of Christ’s first coming, and we look forward with anticipation to his second coming.

We come with the same question as that of the crowds, “what should we do?” We have been baptized, we share in the Lord’s Supper, we know we are saved by grace through faith, we hear “Christ crucified” every Sunday, we know we are to live “set apart,” live differently, from the world around us. But we are sometimes uncertain as to what living set apart, living differently might look like in practice. So we turn to Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Seems so simple. Is that it? Rejoice and pray? Shouldn’t we be doing something a little more concrete? Sometimes we who pray are actually mocked for our prayers. The world tells us that we should do something useful.

But the thing is, that this life we have as baptized believing children of God, is literally a gift from God and we live it in the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. It’s God our Father who tells us who we are, it is Jesus who tells us what is necessary, it is the Spirit who directs our actions.

Now the Apostle Paul tells us what this life, our life as children of God, our life as those who await Christ’s coming, actually looks like. It’s not a case of positive thinking, it is instead the Word of God who conveys the way and the truth and the life for us. This is why we rejoice in the Lord always, because it is in him and through him that we live, love, and are saved. Our joy is sourced in the continual presence and love of Christ. Yeah, bad things happen, we don’t ignore them, we face them because they don’t have the last word. The last word belongs to Jesus.

We are rejoicing and gentle because we do not need to force our will, our doctrine, our agenda on anyone. The Lord has come and will come again. God is with us, anxiety and fear have no power over us. With thanksgiving, praise and joy, we make our requests known to God, who provides for us in this life and in the next life. We

concentrate on living in the promises God has made to us, living in the peace of God which passes all understanding, our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Live at peace brothers and sisters, rejoicing in the Lord, making your requests to God with thanksgiving, share the peace of the Lord with those around you. We receive Jesus who offers himself to us, who comes in the waters of baptism, in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, who comes in the living Word you hear read and proclaimed. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

AMEN