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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Advent 3

Philippians 4:4-7
REJOICE BECAUSE
THE LORD IS NEAR!

You may teach your child to say the words, “I’m sorry,” or “I forgive you.” You may remind them to say these words time and again –even though they may not be feeling it. But they need to say the words so they learn the correct and appropriate response in spite of what they’re feeling.

In a similar way you might sing the National Anthem at every ball game you attend, though at that moment you might not feel quite ready to jump out of an airplane deep in Afghanistan to combat Al Qaida. Indeed, you may have ignored the traffic laws of the nation you are pledging your allegiance to as you sped your way to the game. But you need to sing that National Anthem as a wholesome and ever-instructive reminder of the loyalty you owe.

All year round in our liturgy we sing the glorious song of the Christmas angels: *Glory be to God on high and on earth peace, good will toward men.* With our preoccupied minds we might be tempted to think, “That tired old liturgy just isn’t doing anything for me. I’m not feeling it.” No doubt we’re not singing those words with the gusto of that first angelic choir. But we need those words as a constant reminder of the real and appropriate response to Christ in the flesh. His incarnation means our sins have been atoned for and forgiven! How can we not rejoice at least with our words even if we struggle to feel it in our hearts?

In Philippians chapter 4 the Apostle Paul also urges us to rejoice but not as we would expect. We might think it should be a loud and brash chorus of hallelujahs. There are times that would be appropriate. But the rejoicing Paul speaks of takes the form of gentleness and peace.

Frankly, I’m glad the Holy Spirit instructed Paul to speak of it like this. Though it might be a little easier to make a joyful noise with an organ to back you up, it’s quite a different story when you’re under attack at the workplace, or alone with the kids at home, or sifting through those insurance claims. And when Christmas is over and we get on with real life again, the same

problems reassert themselves and singing loudly isn't going to make them go away.

Therefore may you never try to find your source of joy in the world or in your surroundings or even what your feeling in your own heart. Believers have an background joy, a quiet joy, a hidden joy in spite of every stress headache and everything that makes us grow old. It is a joy that comes from outside of us. It comes from Christ and how He has saved us. It is a joy that will be fully experienced only when Christ returns. In the book of Revelation Christ said, "*Behold! I am coming soon!*" Therefore let us rejoice, because the Lord is near.

The apostle Paul was addressing a problem in the Philippian congregation. It seems two ladies in the congregation were at odds with each other. Whatever it was, it was significant enough that Paul felt it needed to be addressed. It's just another reminder that if you're looking for that perfect church where everything is always smooth, you won't find it this side of heaven. Only by the blood of Christ are we holy. And in large part that holiness is hidden to human eyes here on earth.

The Holy Spirit prompted Paul to calm the dispute and remove any reason for fretting and running each other down by writing, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*” When the general has announced to his soldiers that the war has just been won, why would two privates in the trenches need to keep bickering over the C-rations?

Christ is the best example of true gentleness. Being the King of kings He has all power so that while he was here on earth nothing was a threat to Him. He therefore also had nothing to lose by giving Himself up. He could show true meekness. Earthly rulers need to rule with force and try to stomp out opposition because they DON'T have all power. They have NO guarantee of success or permanent victory.

Since you trust Christ is near, nothing needs to threaten you. Christ's permanent victory is yours. When He returns He will right everything that is wrong. In the meantime He has promised to concern Himself with your every need. You may rejoice truly by let your gentleness be evident to all –at the workplace, in your marriage, at church. Our joy that Christ is near is evident by the way Christians would much rather suffer

wrong that inflict it. While others loudly demand their rights, believers will gladly yield theirs. While others insist on having their say believers defer. While others bitterly complain believers speak blessings.

Like Christ, you have nothing to lose. Thus your gentleness and meekness is actually a sign of strength, a sign that you have power over all through faith in Christ, a sign of your high and noble position as a co-ruler with the Son of God. In the same way that a poker player becomes very calm and cool and is happily willing to throw away everything into the pot when he knows he has an unbeatable hand, so also your gentleness is the way you rejoice that the Lord is near.

Instead of fighting He says, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* Lift pleading, grateful eyes heavenward instead of aiming burning, resentful eyes at people around you. For the people around you cannot fulfill your needs or satisfy your wants. Only God can in the person of Jesus Christ. And He is near –as near to us as His Word that you are hearing right now, and the bread and wine that you will be receiving today.

Don't let satan distract you, in a sense make you ADHD with a thousand different scattered concerns and being offended by this or that. Christ takes away your spiritual ADHD by filling you with His peace. Paul wrote here in Philippians 4, *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

God's peace surpasses all your understanding –anything you can do. Everything that you can try to figure out in your head will not give you peace and security like peace from God. Whether you can balance your checkbook, perfectly discipline your children, put forth a flawless product at work or get your flu shot –God's peace in Christ surpasses all your resourcefulness and capabilities. Even if you could get every person around you to fawn all over you, treat you exactly the way you wanted, always agree with you and bend over backwards to serve you, you might think that then you'd feel better, but you would not have peace. That's because you and I are born with sin. Even if everything goes our way, sin will still deprive us of peace.

Peace can truly, only begin with the forgiveness of sins which Jesus earned for us by His death on the cross. Through faith in Christ God has forgiven all your sins

and is completely at peace with you. Therefore we have a God who loves us one hundred percent, a God who has all power and from whom we can expect that every earthly thing will serve our eternal good, a God who is coming soon and will fix everything.

That kind of peace truly makes us rejoice even in the face of troubles when we're not feeling much likely rejoicing. That kind of peace is your protection whether you're feeling protected or not. That peace will guard your heart and mind to preserve you from despair.

Therefore, instead of being fraught, rejoice. Instead of bickering, rejoice. Not by being loud or bombastic. Be confidently gentle to those around you. The Lord is near. Near to you now. Near in coming on the Last Day. Salvation is yours. All is well. Rejoice.