



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent**

December 15, 2024

## Assurance of Peace

### Philippians 4:4–7

*<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

It had been a very troubling time for the disciples. Their whole lives were lived under a cloud. Imagine a foreign power invading our country, taking over our government, stealing away our liberties, nullifying any sense of independence and individual freedom. Oh, they would let us live in our homes, but they would no longer be *our* homes. They would belong to someone else; we would belong to someone else. Imagine the feeling of powerlessness, the overall sense of defeat. Imagine the anger.

Many Jewish boys grew up angry. It was not uncommon for one such as Barabbas to appear. There were insurrections at times, speedily and decisively pushed down by the ubiquitous Roman soldiery. The Jews were well-known to be rebellious. There were riots. Pontius Pilate was sent to keep the peace. This is why he would release a prisoner every year at Passover. He was trying to keep the peace. But peace would not be kept – then, or now, for that matter. Look at the Holy Land. What an unholy mess! There’s no peace. There will never be peace without the Prince of Peace.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He insisted that John baptize Him. John didn’t want to, but Jesus said, “Do it, in order to fulfill all righteousness.” So he did, evoking the presence of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of God the Father concerning His Son. This same John, who had caused adulterous King Herod and his so-called wife a great deal of unease, was eventually arrested, imprisoned, and executed for proclaiming the truth that it was not lawful for the king to steal his brother’s wife, even if she were – and undoubtedly she was – willing to be stolen. So, unrest from the foreign oppressors, and unrest from oppressors among their own people; they were troubling times, and peace was a precious, rare commodity.

So, Jesus was sent to them to guide their feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79). The angels cried on the night He was born to shepherds in the field that there would be peace as a result of this birth (Luke 2:14). Simeon declared, as he held the infant Jesus in his arms, that he could die in peace, having seen the Lord’s Christ (Luke 2:29). Jesus came to be their peace.



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He spoke peace to them on many occasions. To the woman who anointed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, He said, “Go in peace; your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50). To the woman who touched His robe and was healed of her issue of blood, He said, “Daughter, go in peace; your faith has made you well” (Luke 8:48). We know of two occasions in which Jesus appeared to His frightened disciples after His resurrection, and each time, what did He say? “Peace to you!” (Luke 24:36). On one of those occasions, He asked them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see” (Luke 24:38-39). On the night before His passion, He said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). That same night He said to them, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

So, St. Paul, in our epistle encourages the Philippians to rejoice. Why? Had the world significantly changed for the better? Hardly! The persecution of Christians was ramping up quickly. They had already been dragged into the marketplaces and before judges and kings for Jesus’ sake. Soon they would be fodder for entertainment upon the fangs of wild beasts to assuage the bloodlust of Roman spectators. Several apostles had already been executed by that time. Both Peter and Paul were soon to follow. So why? What reason does Paul give for his readers to rejoice? “The Lord is at hand.” The same Lord, who had been the bringer of peace to His disciples, who was acclaimed by the Prophet Isaiah to be the Prince of Peace, was speaking now by His Spirit through the Apostle Paul, proclaiming that same word of peace. “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Beloved, we have many reasons to suffer a lack of peace – some of them are the same as those endured by the first century disciples. Persecution of Christians in our day is growing more fierce. While it is more often not the case, there are noted exceptions when the cold war of our culture’s animosity toward us flares into very real acts of violence. We may not be ruled by a foreign power, but the devil has surely used our political climate to separate brothers and sisters in Christ from one another. This is tragic! With the threat of wars and rumors of wars, with an unsettling economy and the rising cost of food, with our world’s rapid descent into debauchery and the celebration of abomination, we have little cause for peace. Oh, in this world, we have tribulation. Most of all, we have the problem of sin, which not only separates us from each other, it alienates us from God, shattering our peace in a way that is impossible for us to amend or correct.

But into our huddled corners comes a Champion, who has overcome the world. He has reestablished peace between you and your God and made peace possible between you and your fellow man. He bears that peace to you in His own terrible scars, the marks of His victory over sin and death. You don’t need any more cause for rejoicing than this:



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the Lord is at hand. Your Prince of Peace is at hand. The world's Savior is at hand. And He brings peace, a peace the world does not give, a peace that surpasses understanding. He speaks that peace into our ears, He splashes it on our heads, He pours into our mouths. We feast on it, we bathe in it, we dance to it, for it gives us joy. Rejoice, dear ones, the Lord is at hand, and He brings you His peace. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen