

THE EPISTLE LESSON**Philippians 4:4-7(8-9)****page**

(St. Paul's familiar call to rejoice in the Lord urges God's people to seek and to do the best for the Lord.)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** ⁷ **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me -- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (NIV)

THE GOSPEL LESSON Luke 3:7-18**page**

(John the Baptizer challenged the people to live a life consistent with the Kingdom of God and preached the good news of forgiveness.)

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

¹¹ John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

¹³ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely -- be content with your pay."

¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. **THE EPISTLE LESSON**

Philippians 4:4-7(8-9)

INTRO - Yesterday afternoon I went to Walmart. Ann Knuth had told me about an item there I might use in Christmas Eve worship so I went looking. I have never seen the store so busy. I parked in a parking lot that didn't even used to exist. It was hard to get around in the store because there were more people in that store than I have ever seen. I wanted to get this item and get out, but no one knew where it was and I went from the front, to the stationary, to the Christmas section, to the toy section, and then with managers to the stationary section and back to the Christmas section. All the while I was dodging people. They all seemed to have something in mind. I'm not sure I saw many of them smiling. I wanted to get in and out, and I think I was there over an hour.

- I. I tell this story because Christmas is supposed to be a time of peace and joy.
 - A. Do you remember the message of the Christmas angels.
 1. **Behold, I bring you good tidings of Great Joy.**
 2. And, when the whole host of angels sang they sang of, '**Peace on earth, good will to men.**'
 - B. So, is peace and joy characterizing your advent preparation and your Christmas season?
 1. Are you full of joy at the love of God?
 2. Do actions of love, such as patience and kindness and understanding and generosity characterize your actions toward others?
 3. Or is all the Christmas buying, all the preparation, all the spending and activity getting in the way of the joy and peace that Christ brings?
- II. Then it may be worth it to look at our Epistle lesson for today. God offers joy and peace in a setting that isn't even Christmas.
 - A. God calls the Philippians through Paul to **Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say it, rejoice!**
 1. It is good to note that the joy Paul is speaking about does not come from the circumstances of Paul's life.
 2. Paul is writing from a Roman prison about the joy of the Christian life. Prison does not bring joy.
 3. But, when one rejoices **in the Lord** then that joy is found even in the midst of hectic lives, and pressure, and trouble.
 - B. Paul talks about peace too. And, it doesn't seem to be difficult to find.
 1. **'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**
 2. we are told not to worry, but to turn our concerns over to God.
 3. We are even told that the peace which comes from the all powerful and loving God being in control of our life will then guard us. The peace will guard our hearts and minds.

III. Back to Walmart. All those people were preparing for Christmas. They were preparing for gifts, for decorating, for trees, for get togethers. But Christmas doesn't bring peace and joy, Christ does.

A. But maybe a ChristMAS story can tell you about the source of that joy.

1. When I was in first grade I was always in trouble. I would stand in the corner, in the cloak room, get sent to the principal. My kids have heard one or two of the stories and like the one about the time I brought crayons into the cloakroom and melted them on the radiator.

A. I was sure I was not getting anything for Christmas, and was dreading the well deserved coal and punishment for my misdeeds.

B. I'll never forget coming to the Christmas tree and finding . . . a new bike. It wasn't something I deserved, but it was a gift of love and generosity from my parents.

2. We deserve eternal punishment because of our lack of love, our lack of kindness, our lack of patience.

3. But, God sent His son to Save us. He was born as a baby, died on calvary, and rose again.

4. If we got what we deserved we'd be in big trouble. But God loves us, unbelievably.

5. No matter our circumstances we can be full of joy because that love of God is sure.

B. And, it is Christ who is the source of our peace.

1. This peace is not so much the peace that means a lack of fighting. This peace is an inner calm, a lack of worry.

2. When I know that God loves us with a sure love, and eternal love

3. And I then know that God who loves me in this way is the one in His power and wisdom is in control of life, I can face all the busy stores, all the unmet chores, all the losses, and trials of life with a calm assurance.

4. God who loves me will see me through, no matter what happens.

5. Peace comes from Christ.

CONCLUSION - I did see someone with a smile yesterday at Walmart. It was one of our members. Dawn Brettrager saw me walking across the parking lot after being in Walmart for about an hour. I'm not sure there was a smile on my face either. But Dawn got my attention and I asked about Kalli. Dawn's high school daughter Kalli was to have had heart surgery on Friday, but because the hospital was so busy, it was postponed till tomorrow. But, in the midst of this crazy parking lot, and in the midst of this time of waiting possible worry, Dawn had a smile, a joy and peace that come from Christ. God loves us eternally in Jesus. That love caused God to send Jesus into this world to save us. That love will take care of Kalli tomorrow in surgery. That love of God is a source and is the reason for peace and joy.