

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 12, 2021

TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 4: 4-7

THEME: A REASON TO REJOICE

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

In the name of Jesus:

No matter where you go today, security is a concern. Fly on a plane, attend a concert or sporting event, you need to go through security before you enter. Commercials seek your attention, asking if your phone is secure, if the information on your computer is protected. Financial institutions ask for personal information in order to secure your accounts. Homes in your neighborhood display signs which read: "24 hour surveillance." Walk down the aisle of the local grocery and you will find antiperspirants that offer 24 hour protection. We live in a day and age where the idea of security and being secure is everywhere and ever present.

When you feel secure, you feel less anxious and afraid. You may even be more inclined to take a risk, if you know that your safety will be guaranteed.

When you know you are surrounded by round the clock protection, you can go on living life with a sense of peace and joy.

The apostle Paul gives us A REASON TO REJOICE in our text today. The reason to rejoice is because God is on guard for you, on your behalf. You need not be afraid, for God guards your heart and your life.

There are certainly plenty of reasons to be afraid and to be fearful today. There is the seemingly ongoing threat of Covid. Just this past Tuesday our local Walmart store in Lancaster closed its doors. Why in the world would a store in the midst of the holiday shopping season close their doors and not allow any customers in? They would be losing money. But they closed, for a day, at 2 pm this past Tuesday, in order to sanitize the store due to the outbreak of Covid. Hospitals in Cleveland are postponing elective surgeries because their hospital beds are filling up with patients with Covid. It seemingly is going on without end.

But that isn't all. People are afraid to go out in our major cities due to the outbreak of violent crimes. Some are struggling to make ends meet as prices across the board are rising and inflation is rearing its ugly head. People today are more anxious and afraid than ever, with work stress and job changes, problems in the family or in a relationship, they are affected by various kinds of trauma, or they are mourning the death of a loved one. And

in the midst of all of this, Paul's encouraging words are that you can, in spite of all of this, rejoice!

When Paul addressed the church at Philippi, he wrote this letter while in prison. He not only saw Roman guards stationed where he stayed, but they were positioned throughout the area. Philippi at that time was a Roman colony, and so it would house a military garrison. A garrison would be a place where the soldiers not on duty would be able to rest secure, or be able to stand down, because they knew other guards were in place to keep watch. Roman rule would provide security for the soldier and also those living in the area.

That doesn't mean that the people in the church at Philippi were not without threats, from without and within. There were threats of persecution and rejection of those who were members of the Church. The members of the Church were typically poor, so members were anxious and afraid of losing their jobs, not having enough money to make ends meet, and wondered about the health and physical well being of family and friends.

Yes there were plenty of reasons to be anxious and afraid then as there are now. But Paul reminds his hearers, and he reminds you and me that we have REASON TO REJOICE, because God guards our hearts.

It is the peace of God that guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The peace of God is simply this: God the Father sent His one and only Son to be your Savior. This is the reason why Jesus was born, to bring peace on earth, not an earthly peace that needs to be negotiated, but a peace between God and sinners. God's love and goodwill toward all is shown in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is what the prophet Isaiah foretold when he wrote: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Is 40:2). It is why Zephaniah tells us to rejoice in our Old Testament lesson for today because: 'the Lord has taken away the judgements against you, the King of Israel, (Jesus), is in your midst, you shall never again fear evil. He is the mighty one who saves, He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you with His love, He will exult over you with loud singing." (Zephaniah 3:15-17).

Because of Jesus God is not angry with you because of your sins. He loves you with an everlasting love. Your sins have been cast away from you, as far as the east is from the west. God is on your side. He showers you with His love. And He gives you His Holy Spirit, first in your Baptism, and today in this service, to guard and protect you from the fears and anxieties you have in your life.

The peace of God guards your hearts, minds, and lives in Christ Jesus. His Holy Spirit acts as a sentinel and patrols the perimeter of your heart and the thoughts of your life. You can rest from your worry. You can stop being afraid. Yes, the fears and anxieties of life are real. But God's love for you is greater. No matter the problem, no matter the situation, you can go to the Lord in prayer, knowing that He loves you and that He will answer. Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened. "Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (v 6)

Dear friend, you are loved by God! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God is on your side! He is your Help in times of trouble. So rest assured that you are at peace with the Father, and that the Father loves you with an everlasting love. Nothing will ever separate you from the love God has for you in Jesus. And that is THE REASON FOR US TO REJOICE! For we know that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus surrounds you with His love and He continues to provide for your needs. So may the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen