Peace in the age of Terror

出人意外的平安

Philippians 4: 4-7 12/15/2024

 羅敏珍

***4****Rejoice[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204%3A4-7&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-29430a)*] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204%3A4-7&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-29430b)*]****5****Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.****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.*

Christmas is the season of proclaiming peace. We often sing a Latin song at Christmas, Dona Nobis Pacem, which means "grant us peace".

Christ's birth brings the joyful, loving, and hopeful good news. May the four Advent candles—love, joy, hope, and peace—become the voice of the Holy Spirit, guiding us on the path of following Christ and embodying the expectation in our prayers. In today’s world, where there are attempts to extinguish the flames of love, joy, hope, and peace, we need these fruits of the Spirit in these dark times.

Pray: *"Lord, please send Your Holy Spirit to fill us, renew us, and open the ears of our hearts so that we may hear Your voice and follow Your Word. We ask You to grant us true peace to guard our hearts and minds."*

Paul wrote the book of Philippians from prison, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of joy and, at the conclusion of the letter, highlighting that God's peace will guard us.

At the end of his life, Paul said: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ... The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' Always rejoice in the Lord. I want to say it again—rejoice! ... The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything; instead, in everything, by prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Then the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Paul's farewell exhortation is a farewell of peace.

Paul seems to have a space-time telescope, able to see our present situation. We need 'the peace of God.’

In this moment, during this Advent season, our peace is being challenged. Modern people carry many anxieties and fears. It feels as though hope is yet to be born but is already dying—what could be more tragic than a hope that dies before it is born?

In 1972, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) developed a method to determine when society might collapse. They studied the risks of global catastrophe, limited natural resources, and rising costs, predicting that the economy would decline around 2040. So far, we can already feel the effects.

Imagine living in war-torn Ukraine, Gaza, or being a hostage in Israel along with your family. Over the past two years, the debates over Gaza and Israel have led to many protests on campuses, even school closures, bringing the war into schools—places that should be the safest, most harmonious, and full of love. Imagine facing unemployment, the anxiety of not knowing what the future holds, and inflation. There is much strife. Many worries and anxieties stem from reality, some influenced by the media, politicians, and religious leaders who stir up fear, division, and resentment. Do you have peace?

I want to specifically point out 'the terrorism of language.' We all know and have experienced that words can harm people because they destroy communities, breaking the reconciliation and unity found in God. Sometimes, we hear cruel words, as James says, 'The tongue is a fire... it is a world of evil.' Even among those who follow Jesus, words can create fear and cause us to lose peace.

Paul encourages us, saying, 'Do not be anxious about anything.' The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace. He said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' He also said, 'Love your enemies,' not harboring hatred or killing others.

Before Jesus was crucified, some expected Jesus' followers to arm themselves, but Jesus prayed, 'Father, forgive them.' Even when Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the ear of a Roman soldier with a sword, but Jesus healed the man's ear and said to Peter, 'Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.' It is not by weapons, but by abundant grace.

Christ is the Prince of Peace. He breaks the hatred between people. He is our peace; we are instruments of the Lord Christ’s peace.

The Reformer Martin Luther warned, saying, 'When people lack faith, they are filled with fear and anxiety. Our worries and concerns reflect whether we truly trust in God's care and His peace.

The candles of Advent remind us of love, joy, hope and peace.

Rev. Susan Eastman, a professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, once spoke a very wise word: 'We cannot rely on our own efforts to avoid worry and free ourselves; our efforts only push anxiety underground, leading us into secret despair. However, Christ meets us in our anxiety because He came to humanity's deepest depths of despair. Therefore, God has become the God of peace, who guards our hearts and minds.'

We need protection from the bombardment of linguistic terrorism of this era, for some words cause us fear, resentment, and division. The true battle is the war of our hearts and minds.

An elderly man said to his grandson, 'I feel like there are two wolves inside my heart. One is full of revenge, anger, and violence, and the other is full of love and compassion.' The grandson asked him, 'Which one wins inside your heart?' The grandfather replied, 'The one I feed.

Which one do you feed? Do you feed fear and anxiety, or do you feed your faith? This is a matter of the heart, a spiritual battle. Let us pray that the Lord will strengthen our faith, and through that faith, bring forth true peace—the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

Many people may rely on the state or military to seek peace. During the era of the mighty 'Pax Romana' (Roman Peace), ancient Roman historians described the empire as 'proclaiming peace in the lands they desolate.' . They realized that relying on the Roman Empire could not bring true peace. Peace comes from God. We cannot rely on any nation to attain true peace. A powerful military or wealth cannot bring security. Only God is the source of peace.

Paul says, "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Peace, like a watchman at the gate, is the sentinel of our souls. The combination of the words "peace" and "watchman" is quite ironic. However, it expresses how God uses peace in the midst of conflict, using peace to overcome worry and anxiety. That is the true battle.

Jesus Christ guards our hearts and minds, defending us against the fear that tries to invade us. God's weapon is non-violent and defensive. The book of Ephesians highlights the importance of peace: it calls the 'gospel of peace' the 'sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.' We fight with God's word, surrounding and protecting ourselves with peace.

Today, let us reflect on the condition of our hearts and minds. Do we have true peace within? We need God's peace to guard us, so that we are not affected by resentment. If we do not carefully guard ourselves, bitterness, anger, and hardened resentment will fill our hearts, lacking in compassion, gentleness, warmth, and the love of Christ. We need to use peace to guard our thoughts.

Violence is rampant, and our hearts are numb from overwhelming fear. As Emily Dickinson pointed out, 'Our minds are filled with the sense of a funeral.' When fear attacks our thoughts, we lose the ability to discern and become shallow, unable to reflect deeply. This is why we need peace to be our guard, protecting our hearts and minds.

Paul then goes on to teach us how to put it into practice and keep each other safe. He says: " whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204%3A4-8&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-29434c)] these things, and the God of peace will be with you. 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.'

Our challenge is to remain clear-headed in a chaotic and irrational world. If we worry about each thing and do not earnestly pray to God, we will not have God's peace to guard our hearts and minds.

May we experience the presence of Christ, the Prince of Peace. God's peace is the power that protects humanity. He is the Prince of Peace; He is our peace. In Christ, there is no violence; in Christ, there is no resentment; in Christ, there is no fear. For Christ is the way of peace.

Without peace guarding our hearts, without being in Christ, we become our own enemies. When resentment and fear fill us, we surrender ourselves to the hidden devil within us.

" the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Peace will keep our promises and give us hope. When fear surrounds us and terrifying events repeat like a broken record, creating fear, but peace will protect us, even when we are unable to fully experience peace in the moment. We know it will protect our hearts and minds, and we are full of hope.

Maya Angelou, an American writer and poet, wrote a poem:

*You may shoot me with your words,*

*You may cut me with your eyes,*

*You may kill me with your hatefulness,*

*But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Leaving behind nights of terror and fear I rise*

*Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear I rise*

(Maya Angelou)

We can all rise above, surpassing all resentment, fear, and terror, because the Lord of peace, who surpasses all understanding, is near. Though enemies and circumstances may try to bring us fear, within our hearts there is an unexplainable peace. How can we explain a peaceful kingdom? (Isaiah 11:6) The peace that cannot be explained says,

“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”

The peace that surpasses all understanding is not the peace that people can give us; it is God's peace, the peace that God wants to give us. Jesus said: 'I leave peace with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.'

(John 14:27) Do not worry about anything, and God's peace will guard you."

The world wants us to live in fear, with words of resentment and cycles of terrifying events, but God's peace protects and watches over us. Peace is not just a symbol of Advent and Christmas. God's peace does not stop. In the new year, we need peace every day. It will guard our hearts and minds in Christ.