

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 24th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Peace
Fourth Sunday of Advent
John 14:27**

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

If our lives are dry and parched,
**Lord, send the living waters of your Spirit
to revive us, to enliven us,
to bring forth new life.
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our times are empty and barren,
**Lord, grant us a rich harvest,
send us home with sheaves of blessing,
fill us with your abundance,
and teach us to share the harvest with others.
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our bodies are weary and heavy laden,
**Lord, fill us with laughter;
give us shouts of joy;
envelop us with your gladness.
Immanuel, come quickly.**

If our lives are small and trivial,
**Lord, make us see great things;
enlarge our vision;
widen our borders.
Immanuel, come quickly. Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

When he humbled himself to come among us as a man,
 he fulfilled the plan you formed long ago
 and opened for us the way to salvation.
 Now we watch for the day,
 hoping that the salvation promised us will be ours
 when Christ our Lord will come again in his glory.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**

Advent Candle Lighting

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world;
 the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."
We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

[Candle Lighter]

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up quickly;
 your vindicator shall go before you,
 the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
 —Isaiah 58:8, NRSV

Come, Lord Jesus, our light, and our salvation.
Let us walk in the light of the Lord

Opening Hymn #159: "Oh Come All Ye Faithful" (V 1,4,5)

Oh come, all ye faithful,
 joyful and triumphant;
 oh come ye, oh come ye
 to Bethlehem.
 Come and behold him,
 born the King of angels:

(Refrain)

Oh come, let us adore him;
 oh come, let us adore him;
 oh come, let us adore him,
 Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
 sing in exultation;
 sing, all ye citizens
 of heaven above:

'Glory to God
in the highest!' (Refrain)

Yea, Lord, we greet thee,
born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be
glory given;
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing: (Refrain)

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**God of salvation, in Christ you have done great things—
our hearts are filled with joy.
By your power you lifted us out of the wasteland of sin
and brought us with joy and laughter into your kingdom.
Salvation is your gift to us.
But we confess that often we try to replace your gift with our own efforts.
We try to complete what is already perfect;
we try to add to what is already full;
we try to earn what we already have.
Forgive us for our foolishness.
Help us to focus on your grace.
Help us to live grateful lives in return.
For Jesus' sake alone, Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Your sins are pardoned.
The penalty is paid.
Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Music Ministry: “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” Choir

Responsive Reading

Psalm 89:1-4

¹ I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

² **For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.”**

³ You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴ **‘I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.’ ” *Selah***

Hymn: “God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman” Daniel Gallant

Hymn: “Mary Did You Know? Glenda Gould

Hymn: “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear” Byeung Uk Kim

Prayer for illumination

(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

John 14:27

²⁷ **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.**

Sermon

In the New Testament the word peace appears roughly 429 times. It has a wide variety of meanings; it can describe a harmonious relationship between people, harmony between nations, between friends, freedom from molestation, order in the state or government, order in the churches, and harmony between God and men.

In the Old Testament, the word ‘Shalom’ is used for peace. The Jewish people use this word as a greeting and a way to say goodbye to one another. It means finding peace together and when we part. It can be translated as peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility.

However, the meaning of Peace or 'Shalom' does not mean the 'absence of trouble' or the 'absence of problems.' Instead, it refers to a state of calmness internally and externally, no matter what circumstances a follower of God finds themselves in.

If you were to look at the news or your social media feed on any given day at any given time you would find it difficult to believe that God's peace is in this world. Most of what makes headlines across the globe is bad news, chaos, turmoil, suffering and violence. If anything, the life of the average person in our day is characterized by a lack of peace and the presence of worry and turmoil.

The reality is that all of the wars, the struggles, the strife, the animosity, jealousy, and anger that exist in our lives and in the world today is simply an outward manifestation of the inner turmoil that is happening in the lives of most of the people who live here on earth. Whether two nations are at war, or two neighbors are in a standoff it reflects the inner conflict, the lack of peace, that is held in the hearts of people.

Ironically, many of the people at the center of these conflicts are people who are calling for peace. Peace movements, pacifists and promoters of non-violent solutions have existed throughout mankind's history. Today, we are seeing rallies and demonstrations on a weekly basis that are calling for peace. And to be honest with you, many people from all walks of life honestly desire peace. So why is it that we can never really have peace all around the world?

Perhaps the answer is hidden in our understanding of what peace is and how peace is brought about in this world. Based on the number of people at peace rallies, at cease-fire protests, and calling for peace on social media, we live in a world that is constantly seeking peace, but what is the definition of the peace that they are seeking?

One of the most commonly used definitions of the word peace is, 'the absence of conflict.' When there is no more visible turmoil, visible conflict, visible angst, or anger, we consider things to be at peace. However, peace is much more than the simple absence of conflict.

The truth is that since the history of mankind has been recorded starting almost 3100 hundred years ago, there have only been roughly 286 years of peace around the world, that is about 8% of recorded world history, and that skips terrorism, and other acts of violence. If we were to take those into account, it would be even lower. Also, in that time there were more than 8000 peace treaties that have been broken and war once again ravaging the nations.

This is because when the outward display of conflict is forced into peace, the inward conflict begins to come to the surface. It builds up until it once again boils over into an outward display of turmoil and conflict, through war and violence.

Jesus gives us an interesting insight to Christian peace in the verse we are studying today.

John 14:27

²⁷ 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.

Jesus is making a clear distinction between the peace that he offers his followers and the peace that the world defines. He is telling us that there is a clear distinction between the 'lack of conflict' that the world defines as peace and the true peace that a Christian will experience in their hearts.

When Christians speak of peace in their lives and in this world, they need to do so understanding that the biblical definition of peace differs from the world's shallow view of peace.

To begin with, we need to understand where peace comes from, it does not come from mankind who is conflicted within themselves, in a constant struggle against their fallen nature.

Paul himself said in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 7:18-20

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

How can we bring peace to the world when we cannot even find peace within ourselves?

The truth is that there is only one source of peace in this world, God. It is only when we live in a relationship with God that we can find peace.

The prophet Isaiah teaches us.

Isaiah 26:3

**³ You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.**

When we place our faith and trust in the Lord, we begin to understand that he is the source of peace in this world. As our faith and trust in God grows, we experience the peace of God in our lives. It is our faith and trust in God that shifts the definition of

peace in our lives from ourselves and our circumstances to the faithfulness and divinity of God.

Psalm 4:8 was written by David, a man who had experienced conflict and turmoil throughout most of his life.

Psalm 4:8

**⁸In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.**

David was being hunted by King Saul, constantly on the run, constantly looking over his shoulder. King Saul's minions and followers were all pursuing David, hoping to please the King, yet still in the midst of all of that David writes of the peace that he finds in the Lord.

David knew that it is the Lord who gives peace, the Lord who gives strength, the Lord who gives endurance and perseverance. David recognized that he did not have the ability to overcome the challenges, the trials, and the turmoil in his life alone, he knew however, that God could do all of this easily. David knew that regardless of the circumstances of life that he found himself in, God loved him, and God's will was being done in his life.

It is not made clear in the Scripture when David came to this realization, perhaps it was when he fought the bear or the lion while he was protecting his father's sheep in the fields. Perhaps it was when he stood up and volunteered to take on the champion of the Philistines Goliath. Perhaps it was while he was on the run from Saul and his allies. David's life was not an easy life, and through the trials he had learned to place his faith and trust fully in the Lord.

The peace of God comes from Jesus, Romans 5:1 states.

Romans 5:1

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace that we experience in our lives comes through our relationship with Jesus Christ. When we come to him in faith and trust, when we bow our knee and recognize him as our Lord and Saviour and we begin to try to live a life obedient to his Word, our war with God, our rebellion against him is over in our hearts and we can finally begin to experience the peace of God in our lives.

Before we place our faith and trust in God, we live with that inner conflict, that struggle against sin in our lives, and that is what causes us to live in conflict with God. Before we

place our faith and trust in God there is an alienation between us and God. There is a separation between us and God. When we truly come to Christ, when we surrender our lives to him, those hostilities cease. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ, the prince of peace, and we can begin to have peace with others.

When we have Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour we have peace from God, peace with God and we also have the peace of God.

Philippians 4:7 reads.

Philippians 4:7

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of God is not like anything in this world. According to this passage of Scripture it goes beyond what our human minds are capable of understanding. This is the truth; many Christians will experience peace in their lives when the world around them is in chaos. When the whole world around them is in turmoil, they will experience a surprising peace in their lives, one that they have no real explanation for, a peace that they did not expect to find in their circumstances. Then they remember that they belong to God, and they begin to understand why the circumstances of this world have so little effect on them, and the peace of God floods into their lives. The peace of God is a peace which surpasses our understanding, it is a peace that will flood into us as we place our faith and trust in God.

Colossians 3:5

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

When we let the peace of God into our hearts, our whole life begins to change, we learn that we can face circumstances in this world which we thought were beyond our ability and we can do so because we know God is with us and we are living out part of God's plan for our lives.

When we have the peace of God in our hearts, we can begin to understand how David faced the lion, face Goliath and faced his enemies as they pursued him. He could do so because the peace of God was in his heart.

The truth is that the life of a faithful Christian is not an easy life. In John 16:33, Jesus teaches us.

John 16:33

³³ 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."

We will face trials, tribulations, suffering, pain, sorrow, condemnation, persecution, and perhaps even death, but through all of it we can have the peace of God in our hearts, because God is the creator and author of the world, and it is all going according to his plan.

The peace from God, peace with God and peace of God is possible for anyone willing to set aside their selfishness and come to Jesus Christ as their Saviour. That peace is a result of our relationship with God, it is an outflowing of an understanding of the Love that God has for us, and like the love that overflows from us into the world the peace that we have with God fills us up and overflows into the world around us.

Galatians 5:23-26

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Peace is a Fruit of the Spirit and that means that it comes to us through the Holy Spirit, through our relationship with God.

It comes to us through us placing our faith and trust in God. Remember that Isaiah 6:23 told us, **‘You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.’** When you keep your mind focused on God, when you love him heart, soul, body, and mind, you will develop a living relationship with him. Your relationship with God will move beyond an hour each Sunday into the everyday of your life. Because you are placing your faith and trust in him more and more you will find it easier and easier to place your trust in him as you experience God in your life.

This is the basis of peace; it is not just calling yourself a Christian and going to church on Sundays. The peace that Jesus talks of is rooted in the foundation of faith and trust in God. The reason we can keep our hearts, body, soul, and mind focused on God is because we know that even when the world is in chaos around us, God is in control. We know that even when the circumstances seem overwhelming, if we keep our focus on God, he will settle our hearts and give us his peace.

When we are focused on God in our lives, we are constantly in communion with him. We are praying, reading his Word, participating in Bible studies, talking about him with others, participating in fellowship, serving in our churches and in our communities. We are seeking him out and listening to his teachings, discerning his will, and living our lives

according to his Word. It is out of a life in communion with God that the peace of God takes shape in our hearts.

Prayer and praise are critical components of communion with God, this is why being part of a local Bible believing church are so critical to the lives of Christians.

Philippians 4:4-7 tells us to rejoice in the Lord.

Philippians 4:4-7

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.

Do you see that prayer and supplication with thanksgiving precedes the peace of God which protects our hearts and minds? If you want to find peace in your life you need to build upon your relationship with God. Prayer and praise are two critical ways in which we build upon our relationship with God in this world. When we are actively participating in prayer, praise, fellowship, and the study of God's Word and will in our lives we will be a recipient of His blessings.

Imagine the blessing of living life free from anxiety and worry, this is what God promises to his people. The peace of God offers us freedom from anxiety and fear because we know that regardless of the circumstances and the outcomes of our life, God loves us, God has a plan for us, and it will be fulfilled, because he is the one that is always in control. We find peace because we live in a faithful and trusting relationship with God, knowing that he can take care of all of our needs according to His will. When we know this, truly know this, we can experience a freedom from fear and anxiety, even in the worst of circumstances, this is the peace that God offers his people.

The peace that the world speaks of is not true peace, it is a façade that will eventually fall apart and anger, angst, jealousy, envy, and all of the dark sins of mankind will eventually reach a boiling point and peace will be broken. The absence of an outward form of conflict does not mean that there is peace between nations or people. Until that inner conflict is dealt with there will never be true peace.

In spite of the news and social media, in spite of a world living in constant outward and inward conflict, in spite of all of the troubles, all of the violence, all of the wars and terrorism, God's faithful can find peace in this world, because Jesus Christ came to give us the peace of God.

What an amazing peace it is!

It is a beneficial, calming, delivering, enduring, fascinating, God-given, Holy, indestructible, joyful, lifting, majestic, powerful, refreshing, saving, transforming, unshakeable, victorious peace, that will permeate our lives.

And here we are 2000 years later, still proclaiming the peace of God to the world.

Peace be unto you, Shalom.

Let us pray,

Merciful God, loving Father,
we give you thanks and praise
that you have mercifully fulfilled
the word of your promise to the patriarchs
and sent your only Son
to become truly human
for our salvation and blessedness.

O Lord Jesus Christ,
eternal praise be to you,
that you, being rich, for our sakes became poor,
that we through your poverty might become rich;
that you have become our brother,
that we with you might become the children of God.
Grant that you may be born in our hearts,
just as you, though you are Lord of lords,
have for our sakes become a child,
so give us the right childlike mind.
You are the brightness of the Father's glory
and image of his person,
renew us in your holy likeness.

Heavenly Light,
lighten us through the darkness of this world.
Eternal Life, give us life in you.
Great Prince of Peace, grant us your peace,
and keep us ever in your kingdom,
that we may praise and magnify you in your glory:
you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit live and reign forever.
Amen.

Source: Freely modified from The Swedish Rite: a translation of "Handbok för svenska kyrkan" by Eric Esskildsen Yelverton, 1921,

Hymn #138: “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks” (V 1,2,5)

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
 all seated on the ground,
 the angel of the Lord came down,
 and glory shone around.

'Fear not,' said he, for mighty dread
 had seized their troubled mind;
 'Glad tidings of great joy I bring
 to you, all human kind.

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
 appeared a shining throng
 of angels praising God, who thus
 addressed their joyful song:

Invitation to Offering**Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer**(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn #162: “On Christmas Night all Christians Sing” (V 1,2,4)**

On Christmas night all Christians sing
 to hear the news the angels bring,
 on Christmas night all Christians sing
 to hear the news the angels bring,
 news of great joy, news of great mirth,
 news of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should we on earth be so sad,
 since our Redeemer made us glad,
 then why should we on earth be so sad,
 since our Redeemer made us glad,
 when from our sin he set us free
 all for to gain our liberty?

All out of darkness we have light
 which made the angels sing this night;
 all out of darkness we have light,
 which made the angels sing this night;
 'Glory to God,' we sing again
 now and forevermore, amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Amazing God! We adore you and we praise you.
 We bring our praises in the name of Jesus Christ,
 your Son, our Lord.

We praise you for the way he demonstrated your merciful love
 and your gentle touch upon our lives.
 We praise you for his coming as light for all your people
 of every age and in every place.
 We praise you for his coming to set us free,
 to open blind eyes, and to heal broken hearts and lives.
 We praise you for his readiness to enter into
 all that life in this world means to us, that we might,
 by your grace, share all that heaven is in him.
 We praise you for the way he identified himself with us.
 He entered into our pain, our rejection,
 our sorrow, our hopes,
 and through his baptism, he even tasted
 the results and effects of our sinfulness.
 We praise you for accepting his sacrifice on the cross
 as the price of the healing of our relationship with you.
 We praise you more that through his resurrection
 he has guaranteed our share in his eternal kingdom.
 Lord, our praises are limited by time and space
 and by our human weakness.
 By your grace, enable us and empower us
 that we shall be with you and praise you for ever in Christ.
Amen.

Benediction

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love
for one another and for all,
just as we abound in love for you.
And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness
that you may be blameless before our God and Father
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints