

“Well, keep your head up and be happy, at least you have your health.” What does that really mean? People say that when there’s nothing else to say. It’s said when everything else is gone and all that’s left to hang on to is just some shred of hope. But the hope comes from your health, which can be gone in an instant. So your health can’t be relied on to be joyful.

There’s a feeling that hangs all around us that asks what do we really have to be happy about. A month has passed since the election and some maybe still haven’t gotten over the result. Home prices are staying steady for the most part, but no one can predict the future. Most everybody is dealing with something personal that brings them down. Even with Christmas coming, what is there really to be happy and joyful about?

The world just waits to rob us of true joy even now during the season of Advent getting ready for Christmas. Where can we go? How can we be joyful? Paul’s letter to the Philippians read as the second lesson tells us where. As we make our way ever closer to the first coming of Jesus in Bethlehem and look beyond that to the second coming of Jesus we’re encouraged to...

**Produce the fruits of Advent**  
**Joy to the world**  
**Peace on earth**

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come.* Paul didn’t know the words to that wonderful Christmas song like we do. Still, reading the book of Philippians you’d think he did. **“Rejoice in the Lord always.”** Did the Philippians really have something to rejoice about? Just before this section Paul mentioned a potential division. Two individuals in the congregation were at odds with each other. If left unchecked it could create a split. On top of that these Christians were living in Philippi, a Roman colony. There were always a hefty number of Roman soldiers around and any uprising or trouble from the Christians would result in persecution. They weren’t suffering yet, but it was always a potential in the future.

Philippi was a retirement spot for many former Roman soldiers. It’s possible that a few of the Christians were former military men themselves. Even if they weren’t, they knew being a soldier was all about power. Power won the day and shows of strength were sometimes necessary to keep people from taking advantage. Paul encourages them to take an entirely different direction with strength. **“Let your gentleness be evident to all.”** Be willing to be seen as weak. Be willing to suffer wrongs. Be self-sacrificing towards others allowing them to get their way. It was foreign thinking. It appeared weak. It appeared to be self-defeating. How could they ever get their way if they always gave in?

It seems every day there are more and more reasons to lose joy. Sadness and setbacks give us only hurt. When people are working and playing close to each other with strong wills and strong personalities relationships are bound to be affected. At school the strong will between friends sometimes creates disagreements and fights. At work the desire to get your own way can lead to bickering with coworkers. At church the forceful attempts to get your own way can set off two people against each other. Sharp words might be exchanged. Hurt feelings, bitterness, and grudges are felt. Sinful people interacting with other sinful people leads to more sin. No one wants to take the weak, self-sacrificing attitude because then they won’t get their way.

Where does the ability to appear weak to the world and still find joy come from? Having joy is only possible because **“the Lord is near.”** We get comfort in the face of all that’s happening to us only because Jesus Christ came near. Came so near as to live among this world. So near to win full forgiveness as a gift from the Lord God. Now we wait for his promise to come near again. That gives us confidence that all will be set straight on the Last Day. We don’t have to get our way or demand our rights. We can let others win. Christ is returning; rejoice in whatever happens. **“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”** We wait for the great coming of the Lord Jesus.

Christ could return at any moment. That changes how we view bad things happening to us. Sacrificing means nothing because nothing is lost when everything is still to gain in Christ. Joy is a fruit of faith we can produce and show to the world. Christ is everything, so we can humbly consider other Christians superior to ourselves. We can willingly put our lives at their disposal. We can find hope, joy, and our glory in being a servant to all people. In Christ our status as God’s children is still perfectly safe. The life of Christ, something that doesn’t make sense to the world because it looks so weak, is really alive in us. We look weak to the world. But inside we’re strong. Inside we’re joyful. Inside we’re victorious in Christ. That joy shines out to the world.

Joy to the world isn’t only for Christmas. It does remind us of the birth of the Christ child we’re celebrating soon. But joy to the world is what we’ll be singing on the Last Day when Christ returns for us. We’ll sing of the joy we have because our Savior comes to bring us to glory. There’s another song sung at Christmas that isn’t just about Christmas. Hark the Herald Angels Sing is a song for Advent too. The line, *peace on earth good will to men* isn’t just something for when Jesus walked the earth. Jesus brought that to us too, he brought us peace on earth as a fruit of Advent in our lives.

I'm beginning to think the Palestinians and Israelis will never find peace. Every couple of years another couple of days of firing missiles takes place, one just a couple of weeks ago. Multiple cease-fires have been signed only to be broken. This was the relationship we had with God at one time. Total conflict. Wanted different things. Never would be able to come to any agreement. We fired rockets of sin at him that hurt. We worried about things and showed we didn't fully trust his promises. That hurt God. We got anxious and lost our focus on Christ's return. That hurt God. We continue to get restless because Jesus hasn't returned. We forget, we ignore, and we fail to realize that it could happen at any moment. These sins and plenty of others we commit are worse than firing rockets. God need only fire one at us, the one that punishes us in hell forever.

Yet Paul speaks of peace. Not peace between two warring nations, or two parties on a ballot. Not make believe peace, but real peace. Real peace that comes from God. Peace in our relationship with him. **"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** This peace isn't a state of mind, its actual peace we have with God. It's peace that comes when the grace of God has been applied to our lives and we know that God has set everything right. That comes exclusively through a relationship with Jesus. Christ fills our hearts with peace through the gospel. Peace comes from knowing our sins are forgiven. Peace comes from knowing that grace has set up camp around our hearts and will not let us fall and will not let us be taken captive again by Satan. We're secure behind the walls of God's love.

Peace with God is like an antidote for anxiety. All the anxious feelings we might have in life melt away in the peace we have from God through Christ. When the bad things of this world start to creep in, we must remember that we have peace with God. **"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."** We offer up our prayers of thanks and trust to God who saves us and promises to return for us. How can we not pray with thanksgiving? We live in trust of God that allows us to live a life of no worry and no anxiety. We commit our cares to one who is easily able to carry them away because he brings us peace on earth.

Our greatest encouragement is that the Lord is near. Jesus is returning soon. We can rejoice. Joy from Christ allows us earthly contentment, joy even in horrible circumstances, and a joy in eternal certainty. We rejoice and share our joy with the world. We rejoice in the treasure of peace we have through Christ. Joy and peace are our fruits of Advent.