

December 7, 2020

Dear Family and Friends of Grace,

It's that time of year again. Time to wish each other a **Merry Christmas** and a **Happy New Year**. But with the way this year has gone, with the pandemic, the social unrest, and the political climate, those wishes would seem anemic. Things have all worked together to bring an extra amount of **uncertainty, fear, depression, and hatred**. And it doesn't look like the end is in the foreseeable future. What can we do about it? Do we just keep plodding along, trying to stay safe and find some "new normal?" How do you fight an enemy you can't see? Wait a minute. Don't we do that every day? In **1 Peter 5:8** we read: *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* A look at Advent will help. The season of Advent is about preparing for the coming of Christ as the Babe in the manger, the Messiah at the end of the age, and afresh in our hearts on Christmas, as we celebrate His birth anew this year. During Advent, we focus on four themes; each theme is an attitude. They are **HOPE, PEACE, JOY, and LOVE**. These counter the uncertainty, fear, depression, and hatred we may be feeling at this time.

Hope

In all the uncertainties, as life is turned upside-down, we need Hope. And we have Hope. That Hope is the assurance of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. This life is temporal. *All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls (1 Peter 1:24)*. But the salvation we have in Christ is a sure thing. He is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead (**1 Corinthians 15:18-20**). Because He lives, we know that we will live. Jesus said so, Himself (**John 11:25**). Don't doubt the Promises of God. Believe and trust in Him.

Peace

With this new virus, it's easy to be afraid, afraid of getting sick, afraid of getting someone else sick, afraid of losing your job. The possibilities for fear are endless. We could sure use some Peace now. But what is Peace? Is it just a calm, soothing feeling? How can we have peace in the storms of life? The lack of peace, like all our troubles, stems from sin. Sin separates us from God, makes us enemies with Him (**Romans 8:7**). If we can't have peace with God, all other peace is just an illusion. The cross is all about reconciliation with God (**Romans 5:18-19**). When we are reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have peace with God, a peace that passes all understanding. That's a peace that can keep us calm in the most troubled seas.

Joy

When we were under lockdown, the suicide, alcoholism, and depression rates all went up. People are depressed. It's hard to get happy in times like these. What we need is Joy. Joy is not happiness, but an attitude that comes from Jesus. **James 1:2-4** says: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* We can't avoid the hard times, because the hard times are what shape us. In fact, we find our source of Joy in the darkest moment in history, when the Son of God died on the Roman cross, the Sacrifice for our sins.

Love

Hatred and love have a unique relationship. They appear to be opposites, but they aren't. God is love, but He hates sin. Sin is anything that goes against God's will. But the hatred in the world today is an animosity, antagonism, and vitriol. It's not so much hatred as it is an attitude of being hateful. The answer to that is Love. Not just any love, but the love of God. God loved us so much that He gave His own Son, that if we just believe in Him, we'll have eternal life with Him (**John 3:16**). Salvation, forgiveness of sins and eternity with God are what this Advent/Christmas season is all about. The Babe in the manger grew to be the Christ of the cross. In the middle of the chaos of this life, the one Anchor we have is Christ. Keep the faith. Rest in His arms. And have a Blessed Christmas.

We are having Christmas services in-person. CHRISTMAS EVE – 6:30 PM and CHRISTMAS DAY – 9:00 AM. Masks are required. We ask that you respect social distancing. We clean and disinfect the building and furniture. Hand sanitizer is available. If you can't join us, we will have the sermons on Facebook and our Web site.

Once again, since the words "Merry" and "Happy" seem rather weak today, have a **BLESSED CHRISTMAS** and a **JOYOUS NEW YEAR** in the Lord! and as always,

*The peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.*

In Christ's Love,

Pr. Dale