

HOPE AND PEACE IN OUR COMMON CONFESSION

The candles for the week – Hope and Peace - herald Christ's Advent. Their names serve to illustrate this week's Word of the Lord from St. Paul:

For whatsoever was written before was written for our teaching, that through the endurance and through the consolation of the writings we may have the Hope.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The heart and center of all Christian, and therefore by necessity of confession, Lutheran, teaching is that Christ Jesus was crucified for the sins of the whole world, and especially for we who believe. A reason that we celebrate the penitential season of Advent is to remember why the Second Person of the Holy Trinity came into our flesh – in the Incarnation – to become the sin-bearer for all humans, from Adam to the last child conceived on the Last Day. Jesus came to die in your sins. From that, Jesus comes soon from where He ascended after His bodily resurrection from the dead. In His Incarnation, His Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension, and His Final Coming, Jesus shows Himself forth to be God in power and great glory. These are the messages of Advent. This reality brings believers both hope and peace in a fallen world.

Today, Jesus declares His Final Return. From the Psalm's encouragement to the faithful to call upon God in the day of trouble, comes the promise that He will deliver us. From Saint Malachi's declaration of the great and terrible day of burning, comes the promise that on the Day of Fire the faithful will leap with joy. From Jesus' prophecy of

¹ Romans 15:4.

His Final Coming, comes His encouragement to you *to stand erect and lift up your heads because the Redemption of all of you nears.*²

Make no mistake dear confessional Lutherans, Jesus' Final Advent is fast upon us. From the moment of His death on the Cross, all things needful to prepare for His Triumphant return were set in motion. By the close of the era in which the New Testament writings were canonized, all things were ready for His return. In fact, today the powers of the heavens are closer to their final shaking than at any previous day in history. Those are divinely revealed objective truths: they do not depend upon anyone believing them to be true. How can we be so bold as to state that without reservation? St. Paul gives the answer, which you have heard repeated today:

*For whatsoever was written before was written for our teaching, that through the perseverance and through the consolation of the writings the Hope we may have.*³

The central testimony of the whole Old Covenant, contained in the Old Testament readings in your Bibles, is that God would send His Anointed One, the Son of David, to suffer and die to bring eternal forgiveness to sinners. St. Paul, inspired by the Spirit of the Living God recorded the words read in the Church this day. Paul spoke of the writings, the Scriptures, and, in doing that he was primarily referring to that which we call the Old Testament. It is very likely that the Letter to the Romans was written and circulated a few years before the Gospels of Luke and Mark, and decades before the Gospel of John was composed and read in the Church.

² *Luke* 21:28.

³ *Romans* 15:4.

Therefore the Hope with which St. Paul frames this section of his Letter is the Christ who was foreshadowed in the Old Covenant. It is Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension which the Apostle has taught thoroughly in the words of his letter. From that, one theme that Paul repeats in his letter is that sinners are called to repentance and forgiveness that they might, in unity of confession -- in worship, in life -- be one with God the Father in Christ. To effect this, the Holy Spirit uses Paul's words to draw the faithful into one common confession, that which brings true Hope and Peace, that Jesus is the Christ who came to die in our sins; to free us from them and all their effects; to grant us eternal life with the Father.

For us, the public witness and united life in Christ is succinctly summed up in the Second Article of the Creeds. In that article, we confess Christ. In the four ecumenical creeds, the sections in which we confess Christ are the longest in content, context, depth, and breadth. In them, it is as if we boldly declare - "get Christ right and you get the Father and the Holy Spirit right!" Our holding firmly to the Christ of the Scriptures is one of the reasons we here are still called part of the "Confessing Church."

There are many reasons congregations give for their reason for existence in this world today. Some think their primary purpose is to preach the Word of God to put people into a personal relationship with Jesus. Others believe that they teach to make Christians disciples in order to serve others. Some combine such fruits of the Faith as if they are the central reasons for the Faith. They might sum up their commitment to the Word of God in the Bible by the acrostic:

B...asic
I...nstructions
B...efor
L...eaving
E...arth

That is not what God through St. Paul declares of Scriptures! The Holy Spirit declares the Writings, the Scriptures, the Bible, to be the Book of Life. That Life is found at its heart and center in the proclamation of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins. The central biblical purpose of the Scriptures is to declare Christ so that sinners hear of their sins, will to turn from them, hear and believe in their Savior and be joined in the Faith into a common fellowship – united in confession as the Body of Christ. That St. Paul, guided by the Spirit of God, declares is *written, that through the steadfastness and through the consolation of the Scriptures we may have the Hope.*⁴

The Hope we Christians have is discovered in owning Jesus' final Advent and eternal reign by the Faith. He rules in our hearts through the Word which we regularly hear from His Book of Life. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit's work out of the Word of God, we learn to confess with one mouth, one voice, one heart, the hope, peace, and joy we have in God's sacrificial love for us sinners. This St. Paul declares beginning with these enduring words:

*And the God of the steadfastness and of the consolation give to all of you to have one mind in one another according to Christ Jesus, that, with unity of mind, in one mouth continue to give glory to the God and Father of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ.*⁵

⁴ Romans 15:4.

⁵ Romans 15:5-6.

From that which you have just heard, when you connect it to the text immediately before it, connections necessarily flow. They are found in the two words translated *steadfastness* and *consolation*. You are supposed to hear that the enduring reliability and comfort you are given through the Scriptures are from the God of enduring reliability and comfort. Today's text for these Last Days is one in which you can clearly hear God tie the Word of the Bible to Himself. That solidifies hope in you.

It is through the endurance and consolation of the Word of God, both proclaimed and enfleshed, that you who are the Church are empowered, enabled, and able to live in with a united mind. That, dear sinners, is shown most clearly in this fallen world, when you, as sinners bought back from sin, death and hell by the bloody death of Jesus, publicly confess with Him with one mouth. Are you picking up the divine realities which the Holy Spirit is declaring into your ears and hearts?

God the Spirit is working through the Scriptures to bring glory to the Father and the Son through your unity in speaking His Word. In time, this is most clearly shown in the Lord's public services. Think about how God has worked fulfillment of St. Paul's Words among us today.

With one voice we have confessed our sins to hear God's Holy Absolution. With one voice, God's people have called upon Him for mercy. Through one mouth, God's people have prayed the Collect of the Day. With one voice the Christian congregation has sung the Word of God.

Soon, with one voice, as with one mouth, the forgiven people of God will give Him all glory in confessing before the fallen world, the devil, and even unbelieving souls the ancient Confession of the Church. Through one mouth, God's united people will offer the sacrifice of prayer. With one united voice, we will sing the Offertory and the Sanctus. With voices united with the mouth of Jesus we will offer His prayer to the Father. In a symphony (with one voice) we will chant the Agnus Dei and the Nunc Dimittis.

In all those and more, the united Voice of the People whom God has united speaks His Word back to Him, and, at the same time, into our ears, hearts, and minds. Wow! The Lord's Service is God's means to unite both the strong and the weak in the Faith. It is His Word which we speak, chant, or sing, the power of God which continues to unite us with Him, with one another, and with the whole confessing Church on earth. What hope that brings! St. Paul's God-breathed Word continues by declaring that which those united with one confession of Christ-crucified are freed to do in these last days:

Therefore, all of you continue to welcome one another, just as also Christ welcomed all of you into (the) glory of God.⁶

With those words, God calls the people whom He has united with His Word into one confession to receive one another as our fellow redeemed. With quotes and references drawn from at least seven Old Testament readings, the Apostle drives the Christian congregation, first at Rome, and now at Catalina, to the reality of the unity of confession in His Word which God continues to give to His people. The Letter to the

Romans makes it clear that the first century Church in Rome had plenty to divide it. God had, through His Word, brought Jews into the confession of Christ-crucified into the Church. God had, also, through His Word, brought Gentiles – former pagans – into the confession of Christ-crucified into the Church. With this divine joining came human conflicts. In terms of that congregation, divisions arose over keeping feast days or not, eating meat or not, drinking wine or not, fasting or not, and so on. St. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God he had learned first as an Israelite at the feet of his parents, later at the feet of one of the leading teachers of the Jews, and finally, at the feet of Jesus for three years, Paul called this people who had divided over doubtful things to unity in the common confession they shared, Christ- crucified.

Since this letter speaks first to an individual congregation, we may also apply its words to this congregation. What things which are neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture threaten to divide us? The budget? The decorations of a Christmas tree? The differences in our members' economic statuses? The congregation's chosen mission work? Turn from these, whatever they may be. Confess your sins. Believe in the unity which comes from that which you are about to confess – in particular the Christ who came to earth, in our flesh, True Man and True God, who bore our sins into death, who declared our victory in hell, who rose from the dead, ascended into the heavens, and who is coming on the cloud with power and glory. Find hope and peace in our common confession of the pure Word of God, even as St. Paul declares:

⁶ *Romans 15:7.*

Then may the God of hope fill you [with] every joy and peace in continuing belief, into your continued abundance in hope by [the] power of Holy Spirit.⁷

So ends the passage directed to the Church which God unites in the common confession of Christ. In it, two more declarations of hope ring out into your ears. In their proclamation, that which is promised comes true. By welcoming one another in the Faith, in the unified confession of the Church in her Divine Liturgy, that sure certain hope prepares for the Last Advent of Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Amen, come Lord Jesus!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent II, Populus Zion (LSB one-year series)

Psalm 50:1-15; Malachi 3:19-24 MT(4:1-6); Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:24-36

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Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

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⁷ Romans 15:13.

NOTES

Therefore all of you may welcome one another, just as also the Christ welcomed all of you, for the glory of God.⁸

Then may the God of hope fill you [with] every joy and peace in continuing belief, into your continued abundance in hope by [the] power of Holy Spirit.⁹

“and you all will tread down wicked ones, for they will be ashes under (the) soles of your feet in (the) Day which I (am) making,” says YHWH Sabaoth.¹⁰

will be loosed as a snare upon all the ones sitting upon the face of all the earth.¹¹

All of you must continue to be awake in all seasons, praying that you might be able to flee all these things about to happen, then to be stood before the Son of Man.¹²

Furthermore, everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that “by steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).¹³

All Scripture, inspired by God, should minister not to security and impenitence, but “to reproof, correction, and improvement “ (II Timothy 3:16).¹⁴

⁸ Romans 15:7.

⁹ Romans 15:13.

¹⁰ Malachi 3:21. YHWH Sabaoth can be translated: “I AM, the Lord of the Angel Armies:” the Name of God and one of His titles.

¹¹ Luke 21:35.

¹² Luke 21:36.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tappert, et. al. *The Book of Concord*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959. p. 618.