

Mark D. Reichert

Thanksgiving Eve – Philippians 4:6-9 – God’s Peace to You!

11/24-25/21 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

It’s been a strange year, hasn’t it? It seems like we’re saying that more and more these days. From politicians to celebrities to sports stars to, sad to say, even clergy around our country and around our world, it seems more and more like things are happening and soundbytes are being shared and opinions are being expressed that just make you want to say, “*What?*”

Yes, these are strange times we’re living in – and not only strange, but also uncertain, unloving, and uncomfortable at times. Every year that goes by, it seems like the political and racial and ideological divisions just get deeper and deeper all around us – and sometimes that’s painfully obvious. So what can we do as Christians? How can we deal with a world that is manifestly headed in the wrong direction?

We can do the same thing we’ve always done, because the truth is, nothing we’re seeing around us is new. Nothing is different. Every strange and hateful and hurtful thing going on in this world is a product of sin. It’s the devil’s work and it always has been, even from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. And the solution to living among that sin and in opposition to that sin has always been God’s peace. So this Thanksgiving, as you’re sharing the turkey and mashed potatoes and pumpkin pie, don’t forget to share this blessing, too: God’s peace to you!

See, God’s peace means we don’t have to look helplessly at this seemingly scary, sinful world around us. We don’t have to worry about how we’re going to go on and how our children and grandchildren are going to make it, because we have a powerful tool at our disposal that puts our hearts at peace: prayer. As Paul says here, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.*”

Whether you’re worried about what’s going on with the government or the economy or foreign relations, or whether you’re worried about your health or your work or your marriage or your family or your finances or whatever else it may be, we can tend to be overwhelmed by anxiety, can’t we? Especially at a time of year when the decorations need to be on point (because you need to keep pace with the neighbors), the gifts need to be better than last year (because you don’t want the kids to be disappointed), and the holiday food needs to be perfect (because you don’t want your in-laws to think less of you), there are so many things to worry about that need attention. Now decorations, gifts, and delicious food are gifts from God of course, but sometimes the devil can turn them more into curses with all the extra stress they can bring.

Well friends, if that’s what’s happened to you, take it to God in prayer. Let him figure out all the details, because you can be sure he will. And don’t think that he’s too busy for you or that what you have going on isn’t important enough for him to pay attention to. God isn’t Santa Claus. He doesn’t have a “Do Not Disturb” sign on his workshop. For his children, for you, he always has time and he always wants to hear from you because he always wants to help you. So like the apostle says, “*cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). For Christ’s sake, his ear is always open, his hands are always quick to bless, and his eyes are always on you to guide and protect. When this world seems strange and dark and scary, when you’re having a hard time being thankful for all the hard things you’re dealing with, stop looking around and look up instead at the one who can make all that fade away in the light of his grace and be thankful that you have *him* and you always will, because God has the power to fix whatever ails you now and he has promised his peace to you for all eternity.

And when you pray for peace, you will find that God will also work that peace in a new and better way throughout your life. See, just like we all know that there are only so many hours in the day to do what needs to be done – especially these days – there are also only so many thoughts that can fill our minds, too. So let’s fill them with God’s peace. As Paul says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 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.*” Don’t let all the noise of this world and this holiday season make you anxious and cynical. Rather, take some quiet time to read God’s Word, to pray, and to consider how you can reflect God’s peace in your own life and share it with others. Dedicate yourself to looking for the good you do have in your life, rather than what you don’t, because it is there in abundance. Center your thoughts on the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb, because then that will drown out anything else that might keep you from being thankful most of all this Thanksgiving for God’s peace that’s been signed, sealed, and delivered to you in Christ’s blood.

Maybe we’ve known each other long enough now that you can tell that I’ve always been a guy who appreciates good symbolism, as long as there’s something equally good to teach behind the symbol. And you might roll your eyes at me when I say this, but that’s why when I put up Christmas lights outside my house, the first night we always turn them on is Thanksgiving evening. It’s not because I’m in too much of a hurry to get Thanksgiving out of the way like some people say – it’s because Thanksgiving finds its climax in our God coming to earth to be our Savior from sin and Satan. When we pray to God, that was his greatest answer. When we live for God, that was his greatest motivation and example. And when we look to God, that’s where we find his peace that drives away the anxiety and stress of this strange world we live in. So this Thanksgiving, as we look toward another Christmas season and remember what we’re most thankful for, remember this: God’s peace to you in Christ. Amen.