

“Hugging you into peace.” Colossians 1:15-23.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

In these Advent midweek Services, we reflect on three gifts that Jesus brought us. Last week we reflected on trust. This week it is - peace. Next week it will be - hope.

Yes, Jesus brings us peace. Not peace in a sense of the absence of troubles, but peace in true Biblical sense as the fullness of life, as it is supposed to be. **"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."** What is this all about?

We were created good. God said: “Very good!”

Our first parents knew that they were good enough, more, that they were very good as they lived lives they were created to live. Bathing in the love and affection of their Creator, joyfully leading abundantly blessed and fulfilling lives.

But that was a long time ago. It changed with that fateful event that we know as the Fall. Not only sin and death, but also their companions, shame and guilt, came into our world. When, deceived by the ancient enemy, the old dragon, our parents distrusted and disobeyed their loving Creator, everything changed.

The sound of God’s loving presence alone made them feel unworthy, they wanted to hide, they felt that they were not good anymore, not good enough to stand in the bright light of the One who saw their very hearts. They knew they had done something wrong. They feared there would be dreadful consequences.

They were right. Shame and guilt filled them. They are not the same, shame and guilt, they are a bit different. Shame is when you believe that you are not good enough. That *you* are not good enough. Guilt is when you believe that you have done something that is wrong. That you *have done* wrong.

Since that fateful event all the descendants of Adam and Eve suffer from these agents of doom. We struggle with the sense that we are not worthy, not good enough, that too often we fail in what we do and ever more often we fail to do what we should. There is no peace. No rest. No shalom.

But we are resilient. In a funny way. We want to get rid of them. We have become masters, great experts of explaining our guilt away. We learn how to blame others and how to quiet our troubled consciences, we rationalize away our sinful failings and our unwillingness to lead the life of selfless love, care and service to our neighbours.

The world around us plays on these deep longings that we want to be good. We are pulled and pushed to pursue things and lifestyles that we don't need and that don't benefit us. Whatever the society demands that day.

Otherwise, you are no good... you don't fit in. And we want to fit in. And even if our hearts object to our life choices, we are great in shutting them up: "Stop it, everyone does it, we are fine here!" Until that gentle voice inside us is muted...

So, the pursuits of our long-lost goodness and peace never really cease. They only cease when our hearts stop beating. And nothing, nothing in the whole creation can bring us back to that state of blessedness and joyful peace that our first parents enjoyed before the Fall. Nothing in the whole creation... We need more.

We need God the Creator Himself to help us. And this is exactly what He does. **"He... the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, by whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... He comes to ... you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds."**

Jesus brings us peace. True peace. He makes us good again, innocent and blameless. The Son of God comes to restore for us what our parents had lost. That deep and fulfilling peace which comes when you have a good conscience before your Father in heaven, and when you are assured in your heart of hearts that you are good enough and loved in the eyes of the One whose judgment really matters.

How does Jesus bring us this peace? By reconciling you **"in his body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before"** God. Holy and blameless, yes! He takes away both our shame and our guilt. But how?

Our guilt... We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The debt of our sin is too large for us to even comprehend it. We can't possibly pay it off; we are doomed for the day when all accounts are going to be settled.

But then Jesus steps it and... takes our debt upon Himself. He pays it all. He nails the list of our debts to the cross. In His own body. Blood is spilled. Life is lost. Justice is served. The debt is paid. Now the Risen Lord declares: "I forgive you everything!

And don't you worry anymore, for you have been justified, you have been declared innocent, blameless, pure. Your case has been in the court of God; the judgment has been rendered. You are not guilty. You deserve to live." That's you!

And Jesus deals with our shame as well. With this sense that we are never good enough. Sure, on our own we are not. But you are not on your own anymore. "You are not [even] your own [anymore], for you were bought with a price." Now you have been united with Jesus, the Son of God. You are one with Him and He is one with the Father.

You are His, His Holy Spirit dwells in you and you are clothed in Christ. What does it mean? It means that now you look very different in the eyes of God the Father, compared to how you look even in your own eyes.

Your Father in heaven looks at you and what does He see? He sees the Image of His Beloved Son Jesus; He sees you as His beloved son or daughter. Now He looks at you with His Fatherly love and delights: "You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased. You are so precious to me! I can't wait to hug you!"

This is what Jesus brings you. He became one of us, so that He can unite us with Himself, with a true man and true God, and once He unites us with Himself, He restores what our parents had lost long ago. He gives you true peace.

Peace with God, peace about yourselves, and peace about your lives.

He embraces you and He hugs you into that place of peace, and nothing, nothing and no one will be able to pull you out of that divine hug. You are stuck with Jesus, the Lord of peace. You are stuck with His peace. And what a better place to be.

Amen.