



# RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

## THE WEEKLY BRICK

**December 13, 2009.**

*As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. - 1 Peter 2:4-5*

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

“Joyful Anxiety”

Philippians 4:4-7

### **Context:**

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus this Advent, we have studied Jesus’ return as victorious Lord (the second coming) and preparing our lives through repentance and commitment. One way of preparing our lives is to learn to live “rejoicing lives” no matter what the circumstances. It seems impossible to believe that we can “rejoice in the Lord always...and... “...not be anxious about anything;” especially during the Christmas season! What is scripture’s imperative?

### **Relevant Scriptures:**

*Philippians 4:4-5 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near*

*Philippians 4: 11-13 ...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

*James 5:8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.*

...Living one day at a time  
Enjoying one moment at a time  
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace  
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is not as I would have it  
Trusting that You, God, will make all things right if I surrender to Your will  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.  
Amen.

*Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

*Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don’t lean on your own understanding. [Don’t try to figure it all out.] In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.”*

Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Isaiah 26:3 *You, Lord, give true peace to those who depend on You because they trust in You.*

Romans 8:6 *If a person's thinking is controlled by his sinful self, then there is death. But if his thinking is controlled by the Spirit, then there is life and peace.*

(Answers: Resolve, Realign, Receive.)

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

**Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>** Read: Isaiah 40:11.

This week, the BRICK will have a dual emphasis. First, On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, we will explore the text from Philippians 4, the basis of yesterday's sermon. Second, today, Tuesday, and Saturday, we will follow the daily lectionary for Advent, Cycle "C." The daily readings from the lectionary help to keep our focus on the themes explicated on Sunday mornings. Gail Ramshaw, a liturgical scholar, writes:

For the worshipping Christians the days of each week flow out from Sunday, the first day of the week and the day of Christ's resurrection...The daily Bible readings expound further on the Sunday gospel reading, sometimes by providing background to the gospel's references and images, other times by reviewing other Old Testament stories that record God's good news, or by exploring additional epistles. (Gail Ramshaw. *Between Sundays: Daily Bible Readings Based on the Common Lectionary*. [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997], X)

On the days of liturgical readings, the following order will be used to guide your time of prayer and meditation:

- A verse from an Advent hymn. Reflect upon the words and message. What hope and/or challenge does it provide for you?
- A Bible reading.
- A time of reflection. A time to meditate and reflect upon the scripture and/or the verse from the hymn.
- A prayer for those in need and for one's self.

ELW #254, v.1. *"Come, thou long expected Jesus, Born to set thy people free; From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in thee. Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art, Dear desire of Every nation, Joy of every longing heart."*

Pray for those who do not know or trust the Lord. Ask the Lord to give you the words and wisdom to share your faith with someone in your life.

**Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>** Read: Luke 3:7-9

ELW #254, v.2. *"Born thy people to deliver; Born a child, and yet a king; Born to reign in us forever; Now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal Spirit Rule in all our hearts alone; By thine all sufficient merit Raise us to thy glorious throne."*

John the Baptist proclaimed to the crowds that it was their hearts that God wanted; not their cultural and theological assumptions (we are children of Abraham), or even outward religious acts (baptism) if these did not lead to changed lives. God's coming judgment is going to cut through the human pretense of both Jew and Gentile alike. Nothing in this world can stand in the place of God. God demands allegiance and lives that bear the fruit of that allegiance. Jesus is coming to bring the Kingdom of God and God's demand to reign in human hearts.

**Pray and Meditate:** What/Who "rules" your heart right now?

### **Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> Read: Philippians 4:4-5; James 3:17;**

Sometimes the trials and pressures of living that we face seem to make it impossible to rejoice. However, I think sometimes we mistake the biblical admonition to “rejoice” in all circumstances with feeling “happy.” While happiness is good and important, “rejoicing in the Lord,” particularly in this passage, is an encouragement to recognize that Jesus is with us in all the circumstances of our lives. We are not left to face life alone or without hope for a redeemed future. Paul himself was an excellent example of one who had inner joy even though his external circumstances—such as persecution, imprisonment, and the likelihood of death—were against him. Rejoicing in the Lord in spite of circumstances requires an orientation that transcends present circumstances. That orientation is described in verse 5. Paul says that one’s “gentleness” should be evident to all. The word “gentleness” is the Greek word *Epieikes*. While somewhat difficult to translate, the general meaning is “the willingness to yield one’s personal rights and show consideration and gentleness to others.” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*). Other translations of this word include “good sense,” “courtesy,” “forbearance, and “reasonableness.” From these different translations we can surmise that it is an orientation that flows from a secure knowledge that God is at work. In fact, what follows from this command to be gentle is the affirmation that “The Lord is near.” As a believer, we can rejoice always because we have a secure knowledge, the good sense, and the reasonableness to know that the Lord is near. The “nearness” of the Lord that motivates this quality could mean God’s nearness at all times to the believer, and/or the nearness of his coming.

### **Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup> Read Philippians 4:6; Matthew 6:25-34; 7:7-11**

The Greek word translated here “anxious” means “to be pulled in different directions.” Our desires, our needs, and our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears, our worry, and our anxiety pull us the opposite direction. No wonder we often feel fragmented and confused. In fact, worry and anxiety has definite physical consequences: headaches, neck pains, ulcers, and back pains. Anxiety can affect our thinking, our digestion, and even our coordination. However, Christians do not have to be held hostage to these emotions. In this text, Paul encourages the believer to pray for everything rather than be anxious about anything. Prayer, in its various forms cited in this passage, *petition, requests*, and above all *thanksgiving*, will move us from anxious worrying to thoughtful praising. Whenever we find ourselves worrying, our first action ought to be to get alone with God and worship Him. Adoration of God moves us from a self-focus toward a God-focus. As we pray we are able to realize that He is big enough to deal with our problems. We are to pray and praise because praise is always due to God and because our faith is deepened when we remember what God has done for us in the past. There is an echo here of the teaching of Jesus (See Matthew 6:25–34; 7:7–11). The apostle Peter, who certainly experienced his share of anxiety as Jesus’ disciple, wrote in 1 Peter 5:7 to “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” One scholar wrote that “Anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water.”

Praying rather than anxiously worrying, is very difficult and takes a resolute persistence. One biblical commentator noted that, within the context of the entire book of Philippians,

...Paul’s formula for peace is found at the *end* of Philippians and not at the *beginning*. If we have the *single mind* of Philippians 1 then we can give *adoration*. (How can a double-minded person ever praise God?) If we have the *submissive mind* of Philippians 2, we can come with *supplication*. (Would a person with a proud mind ask God for something?) If we have the *spiritual mind* of Philippians 3 we can show our *appreciation*. (A worldly minded person would not know that God had given him anything to appreciate!) In other words, we must practice Philippians 1, 2, and 3 if we are going to experience the *secure mind* of Philippians 4.

### **Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup> Read Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:3-11**

From the spiritual point of view, anxiety and worry is *wrong thinking* (the mind) and *wrong feeling* (the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. Anxiety and worry are the greatest thieves of joy and peace because they confine us in the past, the future, or both! Consequently, we cease to live in the present moment. It is not enough for us, however, to tell ourselves to “quit worrying” because that will never capture the thieves. The antidote to anxiety and worry is the *secure mind*: “And the peace of God... shall keep [garrison, guard like a soldier] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

When the exhortations of verses 4-6 are heeded, the peace of God will strengthen our struggling heart and mind. The peace of God that “transcends all understanding” is just that: it is beyond the human ability to comprehend. Divine peace guards the believer’s heart and mind. I mentioned in the sermon that the word, “Guard” “phrouresei” in Greek, translates a military term which means “to protect or garrison by guarding.” Likely, during the writing of this letter, Paul was imprisoned. He was chained to a Roman soldier, guarded day and night. In like manner, “the peace of God” stands guard over the two areas that create worry—the heart (wrong feeling) and the mind (wrong thinking). Also, the “peace of God” takes us a step farther into God’s blessings. God not only provides supernatural peace, God “works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) Here we come full circle: anxiety and worry drives us to prayer; taking our worries and anxieties to God, making requests of and offering gratitude to the God who is near. God’s nearness, God’s empowering grace, fills our hearts and minds with His truth and the promises that He will work all things to the good for those have been called according to His purpose. God’s truth and promises give us hope and a transcendent peace that keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Keeping our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, enables us to rejoice in the Lord always! We are able to claim, like Saint Paul, that we are “more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

### **Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup> Read Luke 7:18-30**

ELW #264, v.1. *“Prepare the royal highway; The King of Kings is near! Let every hill and valley A level road appear! Then Greet the King of Glory, Foretold in sacred story: Hosanna to the Lord, For he fulfills God’s Word!”*

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. John was the promised forerunner of the messiah. As John preached and baptized he did so knowing that the coming messiah would bring God’s justice, truth, and healing into the world. Many of John’s disciples (some thought that John might have been the messiah) turn to Jesus because of John’s insistence that “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3:27-30) Above all, John wanted the people to know, and follow, Jesus because Jesus was the One who would fulfill God’s Word.

**Pray and Meditate:** Thank God for those who have led the way for you in your faith journey. (I.e. Parents, grandparents, a Sunday School teacher, etc). Who are you leading the way for in their faith journeys? Seek God’s wisdom and direction.

