

**“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”**

Paul often starts his letters with grace and peace, in some cases, he writes, “grace, mercy, and peace.” This is why pastors typically start their sermons off with this salutation because that’s how Paul does it.

Grace and peace in this Advent season, but what peace? Wars still rage around the world. Just this week a C.E.O. was gunned down in cold blood. Families still fight. In an election year, family tensions only rise in the holiday season as families argue or even choose not to visit over Christmas because of who you voted for in last month’s election. Peace is hardly in the picture when we make a mad dash to the end of the year with meetings, deadlines, family to see and presents to purchase.

Throughout the Sundays in Advent we are examining the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love in the appointed Epistle lessons. Throughout the season of Advent, we wait. We wait for Christ to arrive at Christmas. But we also reflect on the various other ways Christ arrives in our lives through the Word and Sacrament on a regular basis as well as how Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

How can we wait with peace? Paul writes, **“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”** In this introduction, we see the love that Paul has for the Church in Philippi.

Despite all the stresses, anxieties, and fights that the holidays can bring, you can wait with peace because you are loved more than you know. This looks like family, friends, and your Church family loving you more than you know. As much as family and friends can sometimes be a thorn in your side, they care about you, and they forgive your faults and foibles, and even if not everything goes according to plan, they are happy to see you. The love that Christians show one another is part of how we have peace during the holidays.

But even more importantly. You can wait with peace because of the peace that you have in Christ. **“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”** Jesus Christ died to forgive your sins. He suffered out of love for you. He was raised from the dead to proclaim that you have victory over sin, death, and the devil. By His suffering and death, you have the greatest peace of all: the peace of knowing that you are no longer enemies with God. Jesus has made peace with the Father on your behalf.

We all may be wondering what we’ll get for Christmas, but Paul gives us an amazing word of comfort that we have the gift of eternal life. The Holy Spirit who began the good work of faith in your heart will see it through to the end. No longer do we need to worry if we will make it to heaven when we die. Not knowing that answer causes more turmoil than any amount of holiday stress or family conflict. The Father has selected you from the beginning of creation to be His child. The faith journey that the Holy Spirit has started, He will finish on the day that Jesus comes back. How do we wait with peace? 3. Jesus will complete the work He started in you (v. 6).

Moving on, we also see that Paul prays for the Saints at Philippi: **“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you**

**may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,”** Not only does Paul love the Saints at Philippi, he also prays that their love can abound in this season.

Love covers a multitude of sins, and as the Holy Spirit fills us with love for those we are about to see in the upcoming weeks, we are able to forgive those who have wronged us, and overlook offenses from years past. The anxiousness gives way to peace as we are able to look forward to what the next weeks hold, and we can be at peace with ways in which people have hurt us as the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts.

But even more interesting is that Paul prays for knowledge and discernment. Of course this deals with the ability to grow in our faith and trust of God. It involves growing deeper in our knowledge of the Bible, but it also involves increasing in discernment.

Discernment is the ability to choose the best course among many options. The gift of discernment can pay dividends in the weeks ahead with holiday celebrations.

Perhaps the reason we're so stressed about the holidays is that we always feel the need to say yes in order to gain the approval of others. We don't want to disappoint friends, family, and work colleagues. Our friends would be disappointed if we said "no" to the party. Aunt Sally would really miss us if we can't make it to Omaha for the get together. If we didn't step up to help finish that project, that could really ruin our boss' Christmas.

Discernment allows us to say "no" to good things that we can say, "yes" to the best things. You can't be everywhere at once, only God can. You aren't God. That's part of the picture of how you can wait with peace in the Advent season, know that because you already have peace with God in Christ, all other things can take a backseat.

The Holy Spirit uses the gift of discernment ultimately to let us approve what is excellent. As busy as you may be in the next weeks, there's always time for prayer. There's always time for Church. There's always time for God's Word. In these hectic times, these become refuges in a world that sometimes feels like it's spinning out of control. How do we wait with peace? 2. Jesus gives you knowledge and discernment (v. 9).

Finally, Paul prays that His readers may be: **“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”** How do we have peace in a restless season? The Holy Spirit fills us with His fruit. Remember, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. One of the fruit of the Spirit is peace. This you already have in Christ Jesus who has purchased and won you with His very blood.

The Lord only knows what the weeks ahead will bring you, but He has equipped you for the weeks ahead. Through His Word working in your heart, He will instill in you the peace you need to get through these times. He will not abandon you. You will get through it. You have been made righteous and holy, precious in God's sight. You are blameless and at peace with God. 1. Jesus fills you with the fruit of righteousness (v. 11). As you wait, you wait with peace. **BECAUSE WE HAVE THE PROMISE OF SALVATION, WE WAIT WITH PEACE AS JESUS PROVIDES US DISCERNMENT AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.**