

Righteousness and Peace and Joy– Sunday December 16th 2012.

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

Beloved in the Lord,

During this time of the year as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, it is easy to lose perspective. It is so easy to get swept away by all the functions, parties, planning, shopping, baking, etc, and to lose the whole significance of Advent.

Our text today is a Word in the right time. We are reminded by Paul: ***“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”***

The context in which Paul writes these words is religious fervour and activity. These words are written to religious practitioners, who were more concerned with the doing than with the substance. At that time the Jews placed a great emphasis on the proper preparation of food, it had to be kosher, your hands had to be washed in a certain way, and so on. Everything was guided by rules and regulations. Even though these things had a place and a meaning, Paul is trying to tell them that it is not the most important thing.

The Kingdom of Heaven is much more than a set of rules or certain religious ordinances. It is so much more than Church rules, liturgies, styles of worship. The Kingdom of Heaven is righteousness and peace and joy in The Holy Spirit.

Today on the Third Sunday in Advent I would like to briefly look at these three things that Paul mentions here: Righteousness; Peace; Joy in The Holy Spirit.

Firstly Righteousness. Righteousness is our standing before Almighty God. In this same epistle Paul wrote in Chapter 5:

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (5:1-2)

Paul is talking about our Righteousness here. When we believe on Jesus Christ for our salvation we are justified by faith. When we accept that His blood paid the penalty price for our sin, then the Bible says not that we will be, but that we are righteous – we have a right standing before God. We have a good relationship with God.

Through sin we were at enmity with God, but through faith in Jesus we are justified – made righteous in His blood. Paul continues:

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet

sinner, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” (Romans 5:6-11)

Jesus came into the world, to reconcile us to God with His own Holy and precious blood. He came that we may be justified/made righteous. We cannot do this for ourselves, because in order to have a right standing before God apart from Jesus we would have to keep God’s commandments flawlessly. No one apart from Jesus can do that.

Our righteousness, our relationship with God is all because of Jesus. Our works should come as a result of our right standing with God. Our service to God should not be mere religious rites, but a joyous, thankful life that is lived to glorify God.

That is why Paul writes in Colossians:

“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

Whatever you do, do giving glory and praise and thanks to God. Do it in the understanding that He loves you and that your right standing before Him is His gift given to you because He is gracious, merciful, kind and loving. It is freely given to you.

So then ***for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

The second thing mentioned here is Peace. When Jesus was born, the angelic host sang:

***“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Luke 2:14***

In the book of Micah there was given this prophecy concerning Jesus: ***“This One will be our peace.”*** (Micah 5:5)

Jesus came to bring peace between God and man and also man and man. In the text we saw earlier from Romans we read: ***“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”***

When we sin, we do not have peace with God, because all sin is rebellion against God. Sin places us as God’s enemies. It is only through Jesus Christ that we can have peace with God, and when we do then we have peace in our hearts.

When you know that all your sins have been forgiven through Jesus, then you have peace in your heart. You know that God has forgiven you, and you know that He loves you so very much. You do not live in fear of God’s wrath or retribution.

When you live your life in God's will, obeying Him, surrendered to Him in love and faith then you have peace. If you do not have peace in your heart you should stop and ask yourself (and God) why not? Ask Him to reveal to you, through the power of The Holy Spirit to show you where you have gone astray. Peace acts as a good guideline to tell you whether you are in God's will or not.

So many people spend money trying to find peace in so many different ways. If you want peace, then surrender your life to Jesus, because He is the Prince of Peace.

Paul wrote in Romans 12: ***"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* (12:1-2)**

If you do this knowingly everyday you will find that you will have peace. It will not matter what is going on around you, you will have peace, because you will know that all things are in the hands of Almighty God, who is able to do all things. Nothing happens apart from His knowledge and nothing is beyond His control.

When we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, then the natural outflow is that we will have peace with men. This is only natural. If our relationship with God is strong, then our relationships with each other will be on the right track.

The religious right, the Pharisees and keepers of the letter of the law are always fighting. A person who walks in the Holy Spirit is free, and able to live peaceably with most people. Such a person is guided by love. There may be differences of opinion but they are dealt with lovingly.

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The third and final point is Joy. As with the previous two, joy is intricately woven into fellowship with Jesus Christ. He is our Joy.

Paul wrote to the Philippians' Church: ***"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* (Phil.4:4-6)**

I would like to emphasise two things here:

Firstly Paul is telling us to rejoice in The Lord! When our eyes are firmly fixed on Him and nothing else, then our joy is complete. Paul is not writing – rejoice in your circumstances, or rejoice in the world, no he is writing "Rejoice in The Lord!" No sometimes, but ALWAYS!

The second point is thanksgiving. Joy and thanksgiving go together like a hand and a glove. When we get into the habit of thanking God regularly for all things we will find that we have an overriding joy in our hearts.

We are told in Psalm 100 verse 4-6:

***Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
⁵ For the Lord is good;
His loving-kindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.***

The more we do so, the greater will be our joy.

This season and always may we keep in the centre of our minds this truth:

“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Amen.

Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.

All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.