

PASTOR'S NOTES.

“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit....May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 14:17, 15:13 (NRSV)

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... , and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Romans 5:1, 5 (NRSV)

“I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

John 15:11 (NRSV)

“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...”

Galatians 5:22a (NRSV)

“[LOVE] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:7, 13 (NRSV)

Over the centuries, Christians have recognized the days before Christmas as a time for fasting and preparation. The term “Advent” pointed to the second coming of Christ, and the oldest traditions saw this as a time of fasting and used the four weeks prior to Christmas as a time to study both the coming of Christ the first time and the time to come.

In our later traditions, churches have used the four Sundays as a time to reflect on peace, hope, joy and love. These are Biblical words that appear multiple times in the New Testament, and they have an appeal to all persons, regardless of their faith. Notice how those words sound positive to all of us, even though peace is often confused with forcing others to be in order, hope is often confused with wishing that has no basis, joy is confused with ecstasy, and love is confused with sex or food cravings.

These four words, along with faith, are words that have a special meaning for Christians. Not only that, I could argue that they are really only meaningful in the light of Christ. You can look at the Bible passages above, and you can look up in a Concordance many other passages, and you can ask yourself if these words make any sense without Christ. Persons who have come to Christ routinely testify that prior to that, there was no peace, hope, joy or true love in their lives.

So in your conversations with outsiders, whether they are persons who do not believe at all, or persons who believe but are not part of any church (notice that I assume that you are having those conversations – many of us can find these persons in our own families), you might find the response interesting if you ask them what those words mean to them. You can also ask if they think that a person can live without them.

My suspicion is even among nonbelievers there is a yearning for peace, hope, joy, and love. (You’ll have to verify this yourself among the people you know.) If this is true, it makes sense that over the centuries people have used this time before Christmas to reflect on those yearnings. It also means we may have an answer to those for whom this season is stressfully planning dinners, tiredly dragging out decorations, scrambling through stores, and placing online

orders. People hear “*Jesus is the reason for the season*” enough to grow numb to it; it might even sound like we’re trying to dictate those dinners and decorations. But if we are listeners first – if we care enough about others to hear their stories of dashed hopes, peace, joy, and love – then we earn the right in their eyes to share our story. And our testimony may well be the greatest gift we can offer to someone else.

Advent is a time for us to reflect on Christ and prepare, not just for ourselves, but for others as well. There are a couple of books we have that might help with this, and with or without the books you are invited to church meetings for the next four Sunday afternoons at 3:00. These meetings will be at the church or by computer or phone (the call-in information is the same for all the public church meetings). I would consider it a tremendous gift to hear your stories and together I believe we will not only better understand peace, hope, joy and love, but more importantly how Christ brings them to us, and how we can help bring them to others to make their season truly bright.

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

1 Peter 3:15 (NRSV)

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Kam' or similar, written in a cursive style.