

Sermon: **To all who are loved by God**
Trinity 18 December 2022

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Reading: **Romans 1:1-7**

Songs:

Prisoner of Hope - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMTvGYAZDU>

I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DckIHBF964>



There is one thing I want you to take away from this morning's message. It is this.

Your identity as a follower of Jesus is that of a child of God. An identity that no-one and no circumstances can take away from you.

You are a daughter of God. You are a son of God. No longer a slave to fear - because you are a child of God. You are loved by God. You are a child of hope.¹

Today is the fourth Sunday of advent – the season leading to Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Jesus coming to live with us as prophesied. There are three texts suggested for today. The first comes from the book of Isaiah and is a prophesy about the coming of Jesus.

In Isaiah 7²:

“10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

12 But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

13 Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

The 2nd text comes from the gospel of Matthew³ as he tells how the birth of Jesus came about:

“His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

¹ In Zechariah we find the words “prisoner of hope”. Zechariah 9:12

² Isaiah 7:10-14.

³ Matthew 1:18-25

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

Next Sunday we will celebrate the wonder of the birth of Jesus. Jesus born to be with us. God with us.

In Lincon’s message last week, you heard him remind us that this season of Advent is a time for us to find a new sense of hope, to find courage and to find peace. It is the time when we remember Emmanuel, God with us, through the birth of Christ Jesus, and we remember that it is not simply the birth of an ordinary child, but the birth of the very Son of God, through whom God’s plan of salvation is fulfilled.

Lincon’s passage came from Isaiah 35 telling us not to fear, because God would come, renewing creation, creating a holy path for his people and would lead them to a new future and freedom.

Isaiah prophesied about the coming of Jesus some 500 years before his birth. And with the birth of Jesus, the promises of the Old Testament become our story, offering us hope, courage and peace.

Fear not. Do not fear. Perhaps the most often repeated instruction in the Bible. Writers have found some 365 passages in the bible making this statement. If not in these exact words, then in the thrust of what is recorded.⁴

Can you and I have peace when fear surrounds us?

We are in a constant battle against fear! Fear wants to cripple. Fear pushes us to withdraw or to react. It takes away our inner peace. It distracts us from our identity as children of God.⁵

The absence of fear is peace and in this week before Christmas the call on you and me is to meditate and to embrace that peace.

Paul gave this final greeting to the Thessalonians⁶:

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.”

How are we to find hope and peace in the turbulent times in which we are living?

The covid pandemic hit the world at the start of 2020. All of us impacted in so many different ways. Loved ones have been lost, serious illness has been experienced, including ongoing long covid. We have experienced total lockdown and severe restrictions impacting family, school and university. Every aspect of living.

And even as it seemed that the worst impact had passed for us here, we have found that there is no going back to what we might have considered to be “normal”. In February Russia invaded

⁴ See for example this article - [List Of 365 Fear Not Bible Verses - Believers Portal](#)

⁵ See this article: [Fourth Sunday of Advent 2022 - Readings and Prayers for Peace \(crosswalk.com\)](#)

⁶ 2 Thessalonians 3:16

the Ukraine bringing devastation to so many soldiers and families and raising the threat of a nuclear war. The impact has had a massive effect on the cost of living as fuel prices have risen, food shortages have occurred. Jobs have been lost as businesses have suffered or closed. So how do we find peace and push back fear?

We look at our third text which is the first seven verses of chapter one of Paul's letter to the Romans. In the original text this was all one sentence. It contains what has been described as a summary of the whole book of Romans. It focusses on Paul's identity and gives us insights into our own identity as followers of Jesus.

Let us consider these verses. Paul starts by stating who he is, and what he is: Paul, a servant, a slave of Christ Jesus. A bondservant, one who belongs to another.

This is strongly stated, and the image would have been well understood by Paul's readers.

Remember, Paul had not been to Rome. He was writing to an audience that he had not met. He wants this audience to know who he is and what he has been called to do.

He explains that he has been called to be an apostle⁷, a special messenger, a personally chosen representative.

And what has he been called to do? He has been called to preach the Gospel of God, the good news of salvation.

What is this Gospel? It is this - that through Jesus God would make a way to save us from sin and its consequences and restore what we had lost through disobedience and rebellion towards God.⁸

It is the Gospel promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. He grounds what this Gospel is by referring to the Holy Scriptures and the prophesies of the coming of Jesus. These start in [Genesis 3:15](#) but Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most detailed. Consider these verses:

Isaiah 53:2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

⁷The basic sense of the word is "one sent forth," and it is used of Jesus and certain ones who were sent to serve others. Most frequently, it is used with regard to the disciples whom Jesus personally selected as a group of 12 appointed representatives.—[Mark 3:14; Acts 14:14](#).

⁸ See this article: [The Gospel was Promised in the Old Testament Scriptures | Christian Faith \(christian-faith.com\)](#)

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

The prophecies in the Scriptures about the coming of Jesus. And then Paul points to Jesus. The Gospel has at its centre God's Son, Jesus, who was man, flesh in his human nature born a descendant of David. This to fulfill the covenant promises.⁹

And as to his divine nature his unique identity was the Son of God. This was shown by the Spirit when Jesus was raised from the dead, setting him apart as the Messiah, our Master.

What has Christ done? Paul says that through Christ, God has, by grace, given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

This is by grace, God's grace not because of what was done by those receiving this message, in fact despite what they had done.

And the message is for the Gentiles, for everybody, and not restricted only to the people of Israel.

Why is this to be shared? So that those who hear the gospel message will believe and obey bringing glory to God's name.

And then Paul tells his readers that "... you also are among those who are called of Jesus Christ to belong to Him."

Paul has described his identity as a slave of Christ called to be an apostle to share the good news. He now confirms the identity of those receiving his letter. You are who you are through this gift and call of Jesus Christ! You are the recipients of God's grace. Called to be part of God's family.

And then this is reinforced.

"7 [I am writing] to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called to be saints (God's people) and set apart for a sanctified life, [that is, set apart for God and His purpose]."

To all who are loved of God. That is where the readers are to find their identity. They are loved by God and called to be his holy people.

Philip Yancey says that grace means this:

"There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less."¹⁰

And then Paul concludes with these words:

"Grace to you and peace [inner calm and spiritual well-being] from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

⁹ See this: [What does it mean that Jesus is the son of David? | GotQuestions.org](http://www.GotQuestions.org). Seventeen verses in the New Testament describe Jesus as the "son of David." But the question arises, how could Jesus be the son of David if David lived approximately 1,000 years before Jesus? The answer is that Christ (the Messiah) was the fulfillment of the prophecy of the seed of David ([2 Samuel 7:12-16](http://www.GotQuestions.org)). Jesus is the promised Messiah, which means He had to be of the lineage of David. Matthew 1 gives the genealogical proof that Jesus, in His humanity, was a direct descendant of Abraham and David through Joseph, Jesus' legal father. The genealogy in Luke 3 traces Jesus' lineage through His mother, Mary. Jesus is a descendant of David by adoption through Joseph and by blood through Mary. "As to his earthly life [Christ Jesus] was a descendant of David" (Romans 1:3).

¹⁰ Philip Yancey in his book "What's so amazing about Grace?"

The instruction to the readers of Paul's letter is to hear the gospel, to heed the call, to know that they are loved by God and to take their identity from this.

What is the message for you and for me? It is the same. It is that your identity as a follower of Jesus is that of a child of God. An identity that no-one and no circumstances can take away from you.

You are a daughter of God. You are a son of God. You are loved by God. You are a child of hope.

No longer a slave to fear - because you are a child of God. Adopted into the family of God.¹¹

So when fears push in on you, hold onto your identity. Do not let fears define you.

Know that you are loved by God, saved by the blood of Jesus, and that you receive power from the Holy Spirit.

As you prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus find peace, inner peace, calm and spiritual well-being in this season and into the new year.

Listen to the words of the song "I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God.

You unravel me with a melody
You surround me with a song
Of deliverance from my enemies
'Til all my fears are gone

From my mother's womb
You have chosen me
Love has called my name
I've been born again into a family
Your blood flows through my veins

I'm no longer a slave to fear
I am a child of God

You split the sea
So I could walk right through it
My fears are drowned in perfect love
You rescued me
And I will stand and sing
I am a child of God

I am a child of God

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¹¹ See for example [Romans 8:16](#), [Galatians 4:5](#) and [Galatians 3:26](#)