

**CANDLELIGHT SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE – November 5, 2019 – Philippians 4: 6-9**  
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*<sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

In this room, are people who have lived with grief for a long time. There are also people whose grief is extremely fresh. There will be grief over the death of a beloved family member. There will be grief over a change of employment, or a change in health status, or the end of a primary relationship. There will be grief filled with gratitude, and grief complicated by unfinished anger or remorse. There will also be, I suspect, people who are led here by other factors: anxiety, depression, seasonal affect, or just needing a break from the commercial side of Christmas. And there might be people here simply because it is good to come together with others in the name of Christ, in the presence of scripture and liturgy and the Alpine Voices Threshold Choir, surrounded by the softness and warmth of prayer shawls.

It is safe to say, then, that there is no single thing that has drawn us to this place. But what was already waiting for us in this place, is the peace promised by Jesus, and reiterated by Paul in his letter to the Philippians: the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, which will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Those words, “which surpasses all understanding” are so important, especially for those of us who like to understand things, and might get frustrated and self-judgmental when we don’t. Jesus promises us a peace that reaches beyond that which we understand, and that which we do not understand. So when our grief is random, and ill-tempered, and changes by the moment, a peace beyond logic will be there. When our grief pretends to be logical, deluding us that we could have prevented things that weren’t within our power to prevent, or that the memory of our deceased loved ones would be honoured if we get locked in to our grief instead of re-entering life fully, God’s own peace will shine the light of truth on those lies. For grief is not something we understand: it’s a journey, it’s a process, in its best form a companion that can teach us things... but it’s not likely to be something that we understand.

Which makes it that much more important, when we are grieving, to come into the presence of something which *surpasses* all understanding. Peace, true peace, is one of those things that expresses the very heart of our loving God, a sublime, deeply real experience that brings us into God’s holy flow. And this gift, which goes beyond our rational abilities, will, as Paul puts it, “guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

In this scripture, I love the way that it glides so gracefully from this confident statement, about a peace which surpasses all understanding and safeguards our hearts and minds, into a list of beautiful qualities that make life so special and beautiful and noble: “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, that which is excellent, that which is praiseworthy”.

In the depths of sadness, those are hard things to set ones heart and mind on: truth, honour, justice, purity, that which is pleasing or commendable or excellent or praiseworthy. When you're just trying to get through a day, these loftier things seem so, so far away. But this is exactly the word of hope we need amidst our grieving. We need to remember that those life-enhancing qualities were present in our past, we need to believe that they will be the flavour of our future... *and we need to believe that they are part of our identity, right at this very moment.*

God has created me, and you, and everyone, with these virtues woven right in to our DNA: truth, honour, justice, purity. God wants us to view life as pleasurable, to give and receive actions that are commendable and excellent and praiseworthy, as part of the amazing gift of life. Grief may blunt our ability to accept this; blame or regret or despair might try to talk their way into the #1 position in our lives; but none of these get to have the last word. The peace of God, which guards and guides us, which is beyond understanding, stands amidst all these difficult, diminishing things, and says we will get through this. Yes, we will.

When we're not up to the task ourselves, the peace of God is there on our behalf. When we feel strong enough to step into it, the peace of God becomes a gift we bring to others. What a wonderful partnership, with the one who gives us life and breath and meaning.

You may have noticed, that tonight's reading didn't start at the usual place. We started at verse 6 tonight but the usual starting point is verse 4, which says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." At a service where it's explicitly OK to be sad and even tearful, I didn't want to jump right in to this call to be joyous. I *would* like, however, to speak those words now, because that *is* Christ's hope for us. Knowing that we are held in love, knowing that a peace beyond understanding guards us, knowing that God has placed goodness in our hearts and in every heart, it's not unreasonable to think that joy could also be on the horizon. Just as a new day does dawn after even the darkest night, just as resurrection followed crucifixion, joy can and will dawn in your life.

So, friends in Christ, I invite you to be embraced by, and to embrace one another with, this peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. To know that the grief that may be your companion now, doesn't get to define you. To believe that whatever is true and honourable and just and pure lives within you, as a divine imprint. And to see on the horizon, joy, true joy. As you acknowledge the love you have experienced, know that love still awaits.

In the name of God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, our Love, our Life, and our Light, may the fullness of these gifts be known in you, and through you. Amen.

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