

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Christ the King (Proper 29) – November 24, 2024

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...”

–Revelation 1:4a–

When Luther writes his first introduction to the book of Revelation in 1522, he is apprehensive to consider it among as an apostolic book. Indeed, most Christians who read the book approach it with trepidation and regularly come away from it perplexed. However, several years later (1530), his tune had changed and with a lengthier preface asserts that Christians can profit from it in terms of comfort and warning, law and gospel (Luther’s Works 35, 407). In Revelation we are shown how, in the midst of monstrous attacks of the evil one in the world, Christ is not only with us in the battle against the tyrants of sin, death, the devil, wrath, and the law, but that he has the final victory. The author seems to want, from the outset of the greeting of his letter, to demonstrate that this is ultimately a book about Christ and his cross. Specifically, in what way a crucified God does what no temporary earthly ruler ever has: he establishes a new kingdom of grace and peace. Christ establishes this new kingdom, not through earthly politics, a voting populous, military might, or even the spread of democracy in the world. Rather Christ establishes his kingdom, the new Jerusalem, heaven itself, in that he has “freed us from our sins by his blood” (verse 5). While earthly freedom paves the way for human progress, leading more and more into the arena where we engage in activities our hearts desire, Christ arrives to snatch us out of our idolatry and bring us into true freedom: freedom from sin and death that follows.

“Grace to you and peace,” is a new, apostolic greeting among the New Testament letters. Grace and peace are like Siamese twins: grace is the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ’s blood and peace is the joy of the quieted conscience that follows. There is no forgiveness apart from grace and without grace there is no peace for the troubled conscience. Because Christ alone issues this grace that brings the peace which passes understanding, he is the ruler over all kings of earth.

From time to time, the world can bring peace in a limited fashion: peace to property and community, to lands, and to the body. In this way there is an outward appearance of peace. But when terror strikes the depths of the soul and we forget or even despair of the promises of God to us, the limited peace the world brings is not enough. The peace of the land still does not forgive and release us from our sins. Only the blood of Christ can accomplish that sort of peace. When the word of grace comes to you, “I love you. You are forgiven on account of Christ’s cross,” then we are at peace, faith is strong, and we shall bear both suffering and the cross for Christ has overcome them for your sake.

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