**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Perfect Peace”**

Rev. David K. Groth

Dec. 13, 2023

“*In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety*” (Ps. 4:8).

As humans, we want, even need, a sense of safety and security. People go about achieving it in various ways. For some, it’s about the city or neighborhood they live in. Others invest in firearms and safe rooms, Volvos and steel doors. Some install security systems in their homes and set up neighborhood watch programs, buy a big dog. A sense of security is important to us. The trouble is this world is inherently insecure. Because of sin, it’s not working as God created it. So, even if you’ve surrounded yourself with layers of security (as if you were the President of the United States), you are still inherently insecure. For example, no security system can forever keep out death, for the wages of sin is death.

The author of our psalm today is King David. Some calamity has befallen the nation. Many believe it was the revolt of David’s son Absalom, who organized a coup against his father, and from whom David is running for his life.

The psalm begins straight off with a complaint. “Answer me when I call” David demands. “Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!” he insists. You can only pray a prayer like that if you are already in the habit of praying a lot. Otherwise, on the Lord’s ears, I think it might sound like some sense of unearned entitlement. To that one, the stranger who only calls on the Lord when all else has failed, to that one the Lord might say, “Away from Me; I never knew you.”

Then, David turns his attention to those who have turned away from God. “How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?” (v.2 NIV).

Then, David exhorts the people not to give themselves over to anger, because anger never helps and usually makes things much worse. “In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.”

This psalm concludes, as they often do, with a strong confession of trust and faith.

“In peace, will I both lie down and sleep; for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” Did you hear it? “You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” That is, there is no security outside of the Lord. There is no peace outside of the Lord. He alone is the source of true security and peace. Because of Him, even when everything seems to be falling apart, we can lie down and sleep in peace.

True peace is not dependent on everything going well in life. It doesn’t come from a trouble-free existence or from lack of difficulties. Instead, it is rooted in Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Time and again, I’ve been with people facing significant challenges, a terrible mix of health issues, financial struggles, and loneliness. Despite these circumstances they have a deep and abiding faith in God which provides them a profound sense of peace, a peace that Paul says, “transcends all understanding,” a peace that “guards their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7). It’s a gift, not something that can be purchased. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you” (Jn. 14:27). Peace that is rooted in Jesus is not the absence of trouble or conflict. Rather, it’s the presence of Jesus in the midst of it all.

C.S. Lewis said, “It’s no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing” (MC bk. 11, chapter 3, paragraph 7, p. 54). “If you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to or even into the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you; if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die? (p. 309).

Jesus slept in the back of the boat during a great big storm because He knew He was safe in the Father’s hand. And of those early Christians being persecuted, Revelation 12 says, “they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (v. 11). They knew with the Lord, they were safe. They knew the only place they could really hide from sin, death and the devil was not in the catacombs, but under the shelter of His wings.

In America, firearms have been flying off the shelves, a sign (I think) of a country and culture in decline. It can also be a sign that many are no longer trusting in the Lord to be their shield and sure defense. When David wrote, “I will lie down and sleep in peace,” it wasn’t because he had a 9mm Glock on the bed stand. “I will lie down and sleep in peace, *for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety*.”

It’s not wrong to own a gun. It’s not wrong to defend yourself and your family. But please, keep it locked and out of the hands of children. And if you have a gun, don’t put too much confidence in it. You’re going to need more security than any gun can provide.

And children, keep your hands off the guns. Don’t even touch them unless your parent is teaching you about them.

In Luke 2, when the angels announced the birth to the shepherds, they sang their hearts out: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” Peace comes from Him. True peace does not come through armies or edicts. It is not a product of human goodwill. It comes only from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is your peace. Through Jesus, God reconciled the world to Himself.

It would take more than just an announcement. Paul writes, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus takes upon Himself the punishment of all sin. In the eyes of the Father, Jesus becomes our sin as He hangs there on a cross. He bears the eternal punishment of our rebellion. He bears the wrath of God and opens for us the heart of His Father. We can now experience true peace with God. Romans 8, “the sinful mind is hostile to God” (v. 7) which means we were once enemies of God. Now, through the death of Jesus, God has reconciled us to Himself. Now, we are friends of God. God no longer holds our sins against us (v. 19) but holds Himself against our sins. That’s true peace, and it doesn’t come about any other way.

“Put your sword away” Jesus said to Peter. And though He had legions of angels at His disposal, angels who were just itching to come down and set things right, He never gave them the nod. No defense whatsoever. No security. No warmth or clothing or food or drink or shelter. Stretched out on the cross, nearly naked, His flesh torn to shreds, our sin in, with, under and on Him, He dies so that we can have forgiveness and peace with God and salvation. He won perfect peace and security for us by giving up any semblance of peace and security for Himself.

In the 1st century, Jewish rebels sought refuge in the great fortress of Masada. Despite its strong defensive position atop a mountain, it too was besieged and taken by Roman forces.

In the 13th century, the Great Wall of China was breached by the Mongols.

In the late 1930’s, the Nazis simply bypassed the Maginot Line in France by invading France through Belgium.

In the waning days of WW II, Adolf Hitler sought refuge in a bunker. It was deep underground, with many meters of reinforced concrete above his head. But it could not protect him from sin, or from the devil. And it did not protect him from death either. There isn’t enough reinforced concrete in all the world to keep some intruders out.

For some enemies, only the blood of Jesus will do; only trusting in God’s grace will suffice. Isaiah wrote, “You will keep in perfect peace him . . . who trusts in you” (Is. 26:3).

David was running for his life, and then hiding out in the wilderness like a rabbit. His circumstances did not warrant a sense of serenity or peace. And yet he writes, “In peace will I both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Do not wait for your circumstances to be just right. You can have true peace now by trusting in Him who alone makes you dwell in safety, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.