



April 2024

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace to you. The Apostle Paul began all but 2 of his 13 New Testament letters with that same simple greeting: "Grace and peace to you." It seems like a simple greeting. And yet those two words summarize the whole Gospel message. You can sum up everything that Paul wrote in just those 2 words: grace and peace.

First, grace. Grace is the free gift of God's saving love. We do nothing to deserve it. It comes to us not because we are good but because God is good. Grace is love for the unlovely. Grace tells us the truth about our sin and then gives us the gift of God's forgiveness. Grace is the gift that makes life worth living. Grace came to us in the gift of the one and only Son of God.

Then, the gift of grace produces the second word: peace. We are born into a rebellion against God. We are born fighting against God and God is fighting against us to save us from ourselves. We didn't learn to rebel against God. Sin just came naturally to our corrupted human nature. But grace declares an end to our warfare against God. Despite our continued struggle with sin and selfishness, because of God's grace we know that God is our best friend.

Grace and peace. That is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. It is that simple. Even a little child can understand it. And yet grace and peace are also incredibly profound. Paul didn't stop his letters with that simple greeting of grace and peace. Paul then went on to explain what that grace and peace means for our lives as Christians in this complex, confusing, and challenging world. Learning to live by grace and learning to live in our peace with God is a lifelong challenge.

We sinners can find plenty of ways to complicate what should be very simple. The Lutheran movement was really all about trying to get back to the simple basics of grace and peace in the Gospel. And the Protestant Reformation after Luther has been all about trying to make it complicated again in different ways.

It isn't easy in this conflicted world to keep our focus on the main thing. But what I am looking for each week as we gather in worship is to have my life focused on the simple basics of life: grace and peace. I so easily get distracted by all the other things that the world says are so important. But a simple reminder for an hour each week of the grace and peace of the Gospel is just what I need keep my focus in life, to keep myself centered and balanced. I hope that you find the same thing in our worship life together at Immanuel.

Yours in Christ,

*Phil Nielsen*