

“Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD, and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.””

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

In the Small Catechism, there is a section on Daily Prayers, in which Luther gave some guidelines on *How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening*. It is in this section that we find what we know as Luther’s Morning Prayer and his Evening Prayer. As the Christian comes to the end of the day, Luther says: *“In the evening when you go to bed, make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this little prayer: ‘I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.’”* There is one more little piece of advice that Luther gives: *“Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer.”* (SC, Section 2)

For many, that idea of going to sleep in good cheer is an elusive dream. There are concerns about the economy. We worry about a world where God’s creation of us as male and female is not only questioned, but denied by many. We wonder what will happen with the Russia / Ukraine war or with the coup in Russia. We wonder if China has been interfering with our government. We worry about gas prices, food prices, housing prices. We worry about global warming, about forest fires, about so many things. Even though Jesus tells us: *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* (Matthew 6:34, ESV) it is hard to simply lay down our heads and enjoy a nice, peaceful sleep.

It is only natural that, in the midst of this world’s turmoil, we long for peace, for prosperity, for comfort. The people of Jeremiah’s day had the same desires—and there were many false prophets willing to promise peace to the people; prophets who told the people what they wanted to hear. But, as Jeremiah points out in our text, wanting peace, wishing for peace, even longing for peace does not guarantee peace, whether it is world peace or inner peace. There is only one source of true peace, and that is the peace that God brings, as He delivers His people from their greatest enemies—from sin, death and hell. It is a peace that comes through the grace and mercy of God, who has brought peace to His people through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As much as we may long for it, peace is an illusive thing in this world of sin. Where sin controls the hearts and lives of people, peace is impossible. That was the situation in Judah in the days of Jeremiah. The sins of the people kept them from the peace that God wanted them to have. Jeremiah, like so many prophets before him, had been sent by God to proclaim a message of judgement against God’s chosen nation. For years, the kings of both the northern and southern kingdoms had been corrupt and unfaithful. They worshipped idols and forgot the God who had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. In some cases, people had gone so far as to offer their children as sacrifices to these false gods. And talk about immorality! The bible tells us there is nothing new under the sun, and these people had the same vices that we so often see in our world: alcohol abuse, sexual immorality and perversion, and a materialism that worshipped money and possessions as gods.

Jeremiah was sent to proclaim judgement against this sin and unbelief—and to hold out the wonderful promise of God, that sincere repentance would avert the coming judgement. God had already allowed the expansion of the Babylonian empire. The Babylonians had besieged Jerusalem and had carried off the nobles and the best and the brightest of the people into exile in Babylon. But still the people didn’t listen. Now Jeremiah came with a sterner message: God is going to destroy the kingdom of Judah, and the whole nation will be carried into slavery in Babylon for 70 years. The temple furnishings, so cherished by the people, would be removed from the temple and taken as spoils of war to Babylon. Jeremiah was even told to make a yoke,

like that used on oxen, and to wear it to show that the people were to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar and accept their punishment as discipline from God. Thankfully, God also promised that after seventy years He would punish Babylon and restore His people.

As you can imagine, Jeremiah's message of doom and gloom did not make him a very popular preacher. He was hated; he was persecuted; he was ignored. Worst of all, this faithful servant of God was called a liar by the false prophets who wanted to share a more upbeat message with the people. Jeremiah confronts one of them, a man named Hananiah. In direct opposition to Jeremiah's warning, Hananiah proclaimed: ***“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, declares the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”*** (Jeremiah 28:2-4, ESV)

It was a wonderful promise. Unfortunately, it wasn't true. Every politician, every entertainer operates on the assumption that you have to give the people what they want if you are going to be successful. Every false prophet works the same way: give the people what they want. Tell them what they want to hear. The people wanted peace and so Hananiah promised peace. But that isn't what God had planned for His people—at least, not yet. Even Jeremiah wanted peace. He says: ***“Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles.”*** But there is more than just wanting this peace. Jeremiah still knows that the sins of the people are keeping them from this peace. The truth would soon be revealed. As long as the people turned from God and His truth, there could be no peace. God would deal with sin. He would let His people know the consequences of their actions. But God is also a God of hope. Jeremiah did share God's promise, a promise much like the one that God once promised Solomon: ***“if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*** (2 Chronicles 7:14, ESV)

As we gather together on this Canada Day weekend, we can rejoice in the peace that we do enjoy in this land. We don't worry every time we go to the mall or get on a bus that there is a suicide bomber among the crowd. We aren't fearing missiles flying overhead and destroying our homes. Oh, we have our problems. At one time Canada was always in the top five of the best places in the world in which to live. I looked at the latest UN Human Development Index and the 2022 World Happiness Report. According to these lists, we have dropped to 15th place. In spite of that, Canada is still a good country. We might wonder what our politicians are up to, when they seem more concerned about protecting their jobs than governing the land; we might be concerned about the value of the Canadian dollar; we might be concerned about the future job market, or wait times for health services or education—and yet, we have the benefit and blessing of all these things. In point of fact, we can stand up on this weekend, and say with pride and joy: “I Am Canadian!”

But there is one thing that Canada still lacks, and that is the peace of God. This land, and our whole world for that matter, will continue to long for a peace that they will not find until we turn from our sin to the only one who can bring peace, and that is Jesus Christ. In the Gospel lesson Jesus said: ***“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*** (Matthew 10:39, ESV) Christ offers us life in His perfect Kingdom. He offers us perfect peace. What sets His words apart from the false prophets who made empty promises of peace is that His promise of peace is backed up by what He has already done for us. He gives us the peace that He has won for us; the peace that comes because He has faced sin, death and the devil—the real enemies of our lives—and has defeated them through His death on the cross. But death wasn't the end, for the crucified Lord also rose again from the dead. And because He lives, He can bring us that perfect peace that all the armies of this world or all the powers of darkness can never take away from us.

Moment by moment, day by day, we can do more than long for peace. Through faith in Christ, we have peace. When the whole world around us seems to be out of control, we, the baptized children of God, know that ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7, ESV) We have that peace by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Christ died to buy us back from sin and He rose again so that we, too, may live a new life—a life of peace and joy forever. As we turn from our sin, and trust in Jesus Christ, His peace is our peace. One of the collects of the day, those simple prayers we use at the beginning of our worship says: ***“O God, You have prepared for those who love You good things that surpass all understanding. Pour into our hearts such love toward You that we, loving You above all things, may obtain Your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.”*** (Trinity 5) To put it another way, the people who put their trust in God through Jesus Christ know His peace. We no longer long for peace. We have it by His grace and blessing, both now and forever. Amen.