

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

24<sup>th</sup> April 2022 – Second Sunday of Easter

**Revelation 1:4-8**

**GRACE AND PEACE, FROM THE ONE WHO LOVES US**

During this week I was with a group of people who were asked the question, ‘Was there anything in your Easter celebrations this year which really stood out for you?’ People gave answers like: it was a reminder that God sent Jesus to give His life for us and rise again; being able to worship together with our church family; that kind of thing. One person who was there gave an answer which has really stuck in my head. They said: ‘I spend a lot of time with little people (they are a teacher), and one thing that always strikes me about them is that whenever they are hurt or sad, they immediately go straight to the person who they know loves them the most for comfort and support. This Easter I was reminded how much God loves me and that I can always go straight to Him’. For me, that was one of those little ‘oh yeh’ moments. We can be with our grandchildren, and they just want to be playing with us and have nothing to do with their parents, but as soon as they bang their head or fall over, straight away the people they want for comfort and to assure them that everything will be ok is, mum and dad. That’s the people they know can and will take care of them whatever happens and whatever they go through. That comment about Easter showing us how much God loves us and that we can always go to Him, no matter what we are going through, has stuck with me as such a great way of summing up what it is about.

In a lot of ways also that comment sums up this reading we have here from Revelation today. John begins this letter we call Revelation, which we often find quite confusing, by simply reminding us of God’s love for us, and that we can always come to God. He does this firstly by giving us a threefold blessing, a blessing of ‘grace and peace’ (more on that a bit later), from God the Father, from the seven spirits (which we take as

referring to the Holy Spirit), and from Jesus. It's a Trinitarian Blessing long before the Trinity was a set down teaching. This letter was first written to Christians who lived in what was known as Asia Minor, or the very western end of Asia, and it was written to them for strength and encouragement because it was obvious that very soon they would begin to be persecuted for their faith. So John, one of the disciples of Jesus who is now in exile on a Greek Island called Patmos, writes this letter to assure them that they have the grace and peace of the God who loves them in everything they go through. And to remind them, and us, about how we can both know that God loves us and that we can turn to trust Him, John reminds us that Jesus died and rose again for us, setting us free from our sins, and that He now has power and glory over everything and everyone. And, to top it all off, God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, middle and end of all things. God all-powerful. This is the God who loves us, and who we can trust to care for us.

Remember again, this letter was written to churches whose members needed to be reminded of God's love and strength to help them through what they were going through. Sound familiar? I believe that we can say this about any time, but isn't there a lot around us right now which worries us, concerns us, sometimes just really gets to us? For two months now we have been witnessing the war in Ukraine, seeing pictures of cities, like ours, being attacked and destroyed. People losing homes and becoming refugees. Ordinary people having to take up guns to fight. Add to that the other things we see, read and hear, about other conflicts in the world, disasters, ongoing effects of the pandemic. Do you ever wish that you could be a child again and have someone to hold and comfort you, and to know that everything will turn out ok?

There are also the things much closer to home which we both witness and experience. People killed and made homeless by the recent floods. The ongoing effects of the pandemic, including restrictions and lockdowns and their affect on people's lives and livelihoods. Domestic violence, relationship issues, the loss of loved ones, worries about

loved ones, sickness, financial pressures. There are plenty of good, and bright, and happy things in the world and in our lives, let's not forget or overlook them. But there are also things which can at least sometimes put a cloud over it all for us, and make us wish that we had someone to turn to, to give it all to, knowing they both can and will help us through it all.

Once again, in this reading here three times John prays that we will receive grace and peace; from the God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As a greeting it is similar to the greeting Jesus gives the disciples when He appears to them after His resurrection. While they were scared and hiding away, we are told in our Gospel reading for today that Jesus came to them and greeted them, giving them peace and strength, and also faith as we see in Thomas' response to Him, turning them around because they now knew that the One who loved them most was there with them to help them. By how things changed for the disciples, and what they went on to do, we know they now had the grace and peace of the One who loved them in their lives.

When we receive grace and peace as a blessing from our God, we receive it as something which has power, which gives us comfort and strength in what we face now, and which comes with the assurance that the promises it carries have already been fulfilled. When we give a 'blessing' or greeting we say, 'I hope it goes well for you', 'wishing you all the best', 'travel safe', 'stay well'. They are sentiments, they are hopes, they are desires. They are good and they are well meant; what they are doing is telling that person that we want things to go well for them. And it's good that we do let them know that. But receiving a blessing or greeting from God, in this case one of grace and peace, brings with it everything which we are reminded about God from here: that He loves us, He sent Jesus to die for us and rise again, and He is indeed all-powerful over everything. It is this grace and peace which God wants to give to each one of us. That's why He is who He is and does what He does. We receive it simply by believing, even with the faith of a child, a faith

which just accepts that it is as it is. It's the grace of knowing that by God's love we are loved and forgiven. It's the peace of knowing that God is always with us and supporting us in all those things which can get to us or get on top of us.

Sometimes, the answer to our prayers, and what we really need, is knowing we have someone with us who loves us, will be with us whatever we go through, and who assures us that even if all the bad things aren't taken away right now it will all work out well in the end despite what we might go through to get there. I think that's often the way it works with children, and that we as adults often appreciate that as well. That's one way the grace and peace we receive from God works as well. Last week in our Easter remembrances and celebrations we looked to the cross where Jesus died for us, and then to the empty tomb which shows us that He is alive again. It is there we see God at work, for us. It is there that we can see that through faith we have God's grace and peace with us. Because we and our world need it so much, through the risen Jesus we can both receive and pass on the blessing of grace and peace from the One who loves us. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Think about, or discuss with others you are with, is there anything about Easter this year which was really significant for you? Anything which really struck you?
- Think about the blessings you have in your life; the things you are thankful for, things which make you happy, things which lift you up and carry you through.
- Think about the things which you see, hear or experience which get to you, sometimes make it hard to keep going, challenge your faith, make you wish there was someone you could run to and give them all to.
- What does having the 'grace and peace' of God with you mean for you? How does it comfort you? How does it support you? How does it give you strength in what you face?
- This is a blessing we both receive through our faith, and also one we are called to take out. How can you now be a part of taking this blessing out so others can know it also?
- Pray, thanking God that we know we have His blessing of grace and peace with us every day.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
24.04.2022*