In the name of God our Father who fills us with true hope, joy and peace,

He was virtually the most powerful man in the world. He ruled over one of the largest empires in history. Crowds cheered him on and hailed their allegiance to him. The roar from the world’s greatest coliseum rang for miles, “Caesar, Caesar, Caesar!” Julius Caesar was the most powerful man at that time in world history. Shakespeare even wrote an epic play about this man. His life was a tale of great honor and achievement. But then there came that fatal day when those closest to Caesar betrayed him, in the famous words “Et tu Brute.” His closest friends literally stabbed him in the back.

One of the most important ingredients of life is unity. Success depends or falls based on it. How many times have you caught yourself saying to someone, “I don’t know, I will have to ask my wife about that.” How many times have your children noticed a lack of unity between one parent and the other? If mom says no, they know to go immediately to dad because he will say yes. A lack of unity in the workplace causes work to not get done. Any athletic team, before they even walk onto the field of competition, destroys itself if there is a lack of unity. And the same is true of God’s people. United we stand, divided we fall.

Today, in this second week of Advent, God’s Word continues to prepare us for our walk through life’s valleys as we wait for our Savior’s return. God’s Word powerfully proclaims the transforming power of unity. United in our confession of Christ’s Word. United in our expression of Christ’s love. A lesson from Romans chapter 15:

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:4-13

Unity was a problem for those early believers after Jesus walked this earth. Problems abounded not only in Rome but also throughout God’s church in places like Corinth, Philippi and Galatia. The Roman Christians were foolishly arguing about the necessity of eating certain kinds of meat. They ridiculed and demeaned each other for not observing special sacred days. The Corinthians seemed hopelessly divided over church leadership. Everyone had to have their say. Everyone believed they were right even when they were wrong. Some were even going so far as to sue each other over petty differences and hurt feelings. Two women in Philippi were tearing the congregation apart. And the Galatians were just not divided, they were devouring one another.
Satan works hard to cause disunity among God’s people. Satan works hard to stop the gospel ministry from being carried out. Satan works mightily to stop our preparation for Christ return. Satan doesn’t have to destroy God’s church from the outside when believers will do it themselves from within.

What causes disunity among us? Among our families? Among fellow believers here at Peace? What is it? Is it personal opinions about what should be done with building projects and expansion of the ministry of the gospel? Are wounds created from sinful natures that just can’t let go of grudges? Do we build indefensible walls around us because we only want to look at how the church can serve me?

What really causes disunity? It’s not the decisions that are made. It’s not a difference in opinion. It is a sinful nature that is power hungry. It’s a sinful nature that always, always believes I’m right, no matter if I’m wrong. It’s a sinful nature that refuses to forgive. It’s a sinful nature that refuses to see each individual as one who is a blood bought child of God. It’s a sinful nature that fails to see and care about the needs of others. It’s a sinful nature that refuses to depart with the things of life. And in fact, always wants more. Always wants something better. And most of the time, it forgets where all the things came from.

Our sinful nature has dragged us through the muck and filth of our sin one too many times. We are tired. We are beaten. We are hurting. We struggle to find meaning for our lives. We struggle to accept the challenges and obstacles God places in our life in order to build our faith. Our hearts break. And our eyes are tired of all the tears. The old saying is true, “If 50 million people believe a wrong thing, it is still wrong.”

But then the God of hope fills us with true joy and peace as we trust in Jesus. God sent the root of Jesse to destroy the work of the devil. Jesus Christ, the root of Jesse, conquered the grave. The root of Jesse plucked us out of the filth and muck of our sin. Mended our broken hearts and wiped away our tears with his nailed pierced hands. That root of Jesse, your Savior came for you. Jesus came to fill you with joy and peace and unite us together in one hope – the hope of eternal life with him forever. That sure hope in Christ’s Word unites us in our expression of Christ love.

Expressing Christ love is not easy though. It is a gift of God that enables us to imitate Christ more and more. What we do for each other, in reality, is being done for Christ himself. That is what is amazing about the unity believers share. Our lives are all about Jesus. Our purpose is to serve souls as though we were serving our Savior.

Disunity in our expression of Christ love shows itself in countless ways as it destroys God’s church surely but slowly. Our ministry becomes crippled because we don’t have the resources needed to serve souls. Disunity causes a disinterest in volunteering our time in Christ service. A lack of unity in our expression of Christ love causes us to turn a blind eye to those hurting and in pain around us. Disunity, in all its ugliness, shows itself around us more than we care to admit. Nothing gets done. And God’s church and God’s people slowly break and die.

A father had a family of sons who were perpetually quarreling among themselves. One day, he told his sons to bring him a bundle of sticks. When they had done so, he placed the bundle into the hands of each of them in succession and ordered his sons to break the bundle in pieces. They tried with all their strength, but were not able to do it. He next opened the bundle, took the sticks separately, one by one, and again put them into his sons’ hands, upon which they broke the sticks easily. The father said, “My sons, if you are of one mind, and unite to assist each other, you will be as this bundle, uninjured by all the attempts of your enemies. But if you are divided among yourselves, you will be broken as easily as these sticks.

Believers when they are united can do great things. Believers who are united in purpose and mission cannot be stopped. United believers do not have to worry about how the ministry will be supported because they will be doing it with action. United believers will express their love for each other by encouraging those who are struggling with their faith and worship life. United believers will see the importance of life long spiritual growth. United believers will look past their own wants, and instead will look towards the needs of others. United believers will express their hope for life now and for eternity as they are united in their expression of Christ love.

Peace on earth? Love? Hope? Everything that you see in this life and most of what you experience in your own life tells you that those things are not possible. God’s Word speaks quite differently as it speaks of the transforming power of unity in our confession of Christ’s Word and in our expression of Christ’s love. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13) Amen.