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Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon
The Peace of Christ Col. 3:12-17

Paul was the founder of many first generation churches in Asia Minor and Greece. In other words, the primary target of Paul's mission was the non-Jew whom he called Gentile.

Those first generation churches that Paul founded were vibrant and filled with enthusiasm. And yet, they were not problem-free. In fact, they were plagued with problems and conflict.

For example, members of the church of Antioch insisted that Jewish Christians must refrain from eating with Gentile Christians at the same table.

The situation of the church of Galatia was even worse. Some members insisted that in order for Gentiles to become Christian, they must first accept the Jewish religious laws like circumcision and strictly adhere to its dietary laws. In other words, they insisted that the good news of Jesus Christ was for Jews and Jews only.

Paul was devastated by the narrow-mindedness and superiority complex of those who claimed to be followers of Christ. For Paul, it was clear that "in Jesus, there are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free; all are equally precious in the sight of God."

But Paul did not say to them, "Look at me. I am good. Be like me." He said none of that, because he knew that often he had been more harsh than firm in his criticism; he had not been free from sarcasm and anger.

Listen to what he wrote to the Christians in Rome. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans. 7)

On the surface that sounds pretty dismal. And yet, Paul was full of hope; in the same letter he says this. "Nothing, even death, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He knew that God loved him in spite of his wretchedness and shortcomings. That is why he did not focus on how good he was but how good God was. His hope lay solely in the grace of God.

We may compare the grace of God to the oxygen we breathe. We cannot see it. We cannot feel it. But we know it is there. Without it we die.

The grace of God is like that. We often take it for granted. We often ignore it. We often forget about it. But the grace of God sustains each one of us in every single moment. We can be human and humane, not because we are good, but God is good. This conviction is the peace of Christ.

What does all this mean to us, members of JAUC? Its message is two-fold. One. Live each day lovingly in the world to make human life truly human. Do not slack off. Do not be complacent. Do not be self-righteous. Look up to God always. Keep praying. Keep working. Keep the Sabbath holy.

The second message is this. "If you fall flat on your face, that's OK. I will lift you up. If you stumble, that's OK. I will straighten your walk. "Come to me all you who are heavy laden. I will give you rest."

So let us live each and every day, affirming together with Paul, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord. Whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8.)

The serenity, calmness, and hope that this affirmation brings us, that is the peace of Christ that braces us for the living of these days.

Thanks be to God.