

October 11, 2020 Sermon  
Philippians 4: 1-9

When I was young, my family didn't take all that many vacations, but when we *did*, they were *long* and *arduous*. *Sure*, we got away from it all, but it didn't always *seem* like a vacation. I remember one summer we went to South Dakota. We left at four in the morning from our farm in Ohio, and arrived there sometime in the early evening. And yes, we drove there.

Our car had no air conditioning, so we all had that wind-blown look every time we stopped for a break, which was rare, because dad didn't like to stop. We had to make *good* time don't you know! And making good time had everything to do with high rates of speed, normally 70 miles per hour or more, and my mom's *awesome* map-reading skills.

There are times now when I don't trust my gps to tell me where to go, but I *follow* it, anyway, and if I *have* to turn around, well, I turn around. Mom had a fierceness about her when she was reading maps. She could tell us exactly how many miles it would be to the next town. She could tell us about the time we would arrive and her directional aptitude was like no other. But even with all those unique and wonderful skills, and the ability to give my dad ample time to find the crossroad for the next turn, he would *inevitably* ignore his wife's guidance system.

Immediately following this directional ineptitude, my mother would begin to speak to him in a very loud, angst-ridden and high-pitched voice, due to the fact that all the windows in the car were opened, and he would respond, in kind. *This* is the activity that would make the trip seem *nothing at all* like a vacation.

According to Paul, living in Jesus means living together with *others*. We know that living with others, whether you're married to them, or whether you are roommates or just very close friends, there will be times when you will grate on each other's nerves.

Paul is writing this letter from prison. The people of Philippi, were some of Paul's *favorite* people. When he had last visited, there was great joy in the community as he proclaimed the gospel to them, but in Paul's absence, that joy started to subside.

Tensions were rising, so Paul writes this letter to Euodia and Syntyche. They are church co-leaders, not to mention females, who have been at *odds* with one another. It's also possible they are at odds with Paul as he has wound up in prison and is unable to speak to them in person.

Paul urges the two of them, in this letter, to be of the same mind in the Lord, to stop bickering with one another. He *also* asks an unnamed companion to help these women, because they had once struggled with Paul while spreading the news of the gospel.

Paul *also* urges the *rest* of the people of Philippi to keep doing the things that were *learned* and *received* and *heard* and **seen** in him. *Doing* so, will allow them to see that the God of peace is with them.

Being in prison, one would think Paul was scared or anxious or deeply depressed, but instead, he has a calm confidence about him and encourages the Philippians to rejoice until they, meaning Paul and the Philippians, see one another again.

Being in prison is not likely to bring out the *best* in most people. Prison ministries these days are most likely done by people on the *outside*, *not* people on the *inside*, but we must also remember that prisons of today are not *like* prisons in Paul's time.

Paul found strength in the joy of the Lord, and he used that joy to bring God's kingdom to light even in the dank, dark, depths of prison, and he wanted the people of Philippi to see that even through his struggle in prison, God was still near to him.

And even as the people of Philippi *struggled* together, Paul was eager for them to work through their differences. Joy will *always* come about through adversity. Arguments, disagreements, and discussions will *always* end in finding joy. Joy is not necessarily a goal, but an *outcome* that is shared by those who come to an agreement.

Being on vacation with two arguing parents *always* got us where we needed to be, and that, *too*, resulted *in joy*! Joy also comes to us as we are faced with the difficulties in life when we realize God is near to us in Christ. **Christ** should be the ultimate *source* of our *joy*, and *this* is Paul's preaching!

Paul says to the people of Philippi, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be *known* to *everyone*. The Lord is near. Do not worry about *anything*, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your *requests* be made *known* to God."

Do not worry about *anything*. Let your requests be made known to God.

Paul tells the Philippians, and this is a good word for us, today, too, to bring *everything* to God. We are living in times where we could *absolutely* worry ourselves to *death* about *everything*.

Pick something, it's out there. Sickness, unemployment, concerns about whether we can make the next payment on whatever we're making payments on, worry about whether our children are ever going to be back in a normal school setting.

We are concerned about keeping each other safe from the virus that spreads so easily, but Paul says, *pray* about it. Leave your *worries* behind. This does *not* mean that you are to *accept* things as they are, but seeing it in a different light and that you put it in the hands of God in Christ.

We are to keep on doing the things we've learned and received and heard about the gospel, and we are to give *thanks* for those things. In return, our lives will be filled with joy.

Late last week, I received a call from someone that needed to have a big extermination job done in their home, but they were unable to pay the huge amount that was estimated to do the job. The woman told me that she and her husband were retired but were also disabled and they were raising their ten-year-old granddaughter.

After asking her more questions about her situation and if she had requested help from anyone else, she got weepy and told me everywhere she called for assistance, they gave her another number and she was at her wits' end. I told her I would try my best to make this her last phone call.

Due to the generosity of members of our church and our WELCA members, we were able to help her with what she needed. I was overjoyed at the positive response I received when I presented this need. I was also thrilled to be able to call the woman back and tell her that her needs would be taken care of.

She was overcome with tears as she thanked us for filling a need. These are times, when I *know* God is at work. She *thanked* God for us and there was definite joy in that conversation.

These are the times when I know we are following our mission statement of being the light of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit to spread the Good News of God's Salvation through worship, prayer, and loving service.

The ladies of the church were able to come together, along with the keeper of the pastor's discretionary fund to help make the kingdom of God visible to others. Sometimes spreading joy and the good news of the gospel, looks like paying for an exterminator at a trying time for someone in need.

And because the work of Jesus' followers *is always* present and *never* done, Paul shares with *us* as well as the *Philippians*, when he says, "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is *any* excellence and if there is *anything* worthy of praise, *think* about these things."

In working together toward a goal, there will *always* be discussion, disagreements, and arguments about what is right and what is wrong. If you are one of the participants in *such* a group, *please* understand that you do not *fight* for *yourselves* but for *families*, or *cities*, or your *congregation*. Working together, discussing and then coming to an agreement is *your* service to humanity in *whatever* group you are working in and for.

Paul encourages the church to fight together for the gospel. “If there is *anything* worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, says Paul, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Following God in Christ together is sometimes, like reading a road map. We may take wrong turns, or we may ignore what God is saying to us, but, with prayer and thoughtful recognition of God’s promises to us, we will *get* where we need to go, with joy in our hearts, as the God of peace accompanies us along the way! Amen.