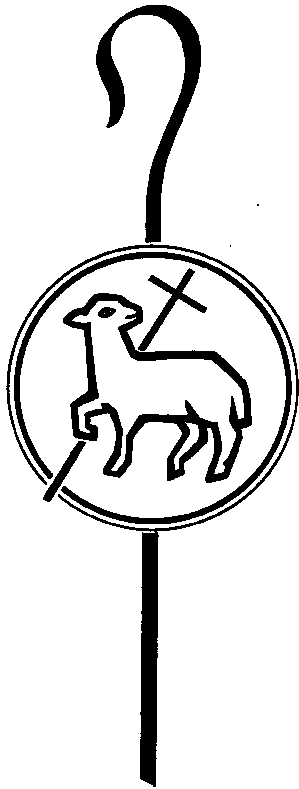


## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

December 1, 2009

Dearest Family,



The juxtaposition of Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday is an interesting illustration of warring impulses. One of the feature essays in last Saturday's London Financial Times was headed "Giving Thanks for Black Friday," a wry comment by the journalist, Vanessa Friedman, trying to explain the Friday phenomenon to UK readers. Of course, she is implying the already secondary role and reputation of Thanksgiving Day. One way to put it would be this: "We are grateful on Thanksgiving Day that tomorrow we can be greedy again!" Consumption will not allow thoughts of contentment to live too long. Ms Friedman lists the days that were named "Black" because of various economic disasters: the US stock market crashes of October 19, 1987 (Monday) and October 29, 1929 (Tuesday); Black Thursday when the US stock market began its slide in 1929, which culminated in the Tuesday crash; Black Friday that also relates to economics, when the US gold market collapsed in 1869. Then she writes thus: "*November 27's Black Friday was black because, theoretically, it is the day the balance sheets of American stores go into the black, thanks to the crazed shopping of consumers using the Thanksgiving break to do their holiday gift buying. To get consumers through the doors, the stores use the Thanksgiving holiday for some equally crazed one- or two-day discounting. In other words, these*

*days, when you hear the words "Black Friday", you don't need to worry about your stock portfolio, just your credit card balance...The implication, really, of calling a big shopping day a black day is "shopping = bad". No wonder it's an American term; it captures the duality of the US attitude to consumption pretty much perfectly. The country is full of mea culpas about irresponsible purchasing (of houses, cars, dresses); on the other hand, spending is positioned as a patriotic activity."*

It is interesting to note how frequently the headline, "*The season of discontent*" pops up in new magazines and newspapers in just about every language, describing local as well as global conditions. The phrase is an adaptation of the opening line of Shakespeare's play Richard III: "Now is the winter of our discontent," capturing not only a sense of disjointedness in the body politic but also describing Richard's own personal feelings about being out of sync, unfulfilled. On Sunday my concern was to emphasize the scriptural truth that contentment is the great fuel and ally of thanksgiving, and its antithesis, discontent, is the great subverter of it. It's amazing how much the Bible has to say about both, and how clearly it delineates both the friends of contentment as well as its foes. You'll need to get the CD for the details, and my hope is that as a result of your own meditation and consideration, you will add other points to the kick-start lists I gave you for both friends and foes.

I spent some time looking at the key passage in Philippians 4 in which Paul says this: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation." (v.12) Wow! The word Paul uses here for "learned" is a technical expression that was used to describe the instruction of initiation rites, implying a severe degree of difficulty, of a course of experience that was not a natural choice. There's something else here that is very important to understand. Paul's learning was not just something he'd picked up through a patchwork experience of tough times and hard knocks. The tense used here is that this learning was a once and for all experience in a definite point of time, which then opened up the possibility of a continuance of this same experience in all circumstances, whether good or bad. Do you get what this means? It is huge for your Christian walk. When was the definite point in time when everything changed? When our perspective on the true meaning and value of everything changed? When our understanding of our purpose and satisfaction changed? Paul puts this experience in the context of our salvation no less. It was the change of heart that salvation wrought

that changed his perspective, that taught him how to be content now in whatever circumstance because his life no longer consisted in the stuff, or in the feelings, or in the circumstantial securities.

This means we cannot say that contentment is only possible for those who are thus temperamentally suited: more placid and passive, less demanding, more holy. Contentment is presented as a fruit of our salvation. Contentment is not an elective, not an option. This is why the Puritans called it a “necessary lesson.” And now we understand why Paul stressed it was “through Christ” because he can take no credit for his contentment as if it was particular to his ability or spirituality. In summary, this is what we can say about contentment from this passage thus far:

- i. It is a necessary evidence of conversion
- ii. It is a supernatural and not a natural characteristic and response
- iii. It is not just an advisable choice but an expectation of our heavenly Father, an expression of the Son’s indwelling life and the Spirit’s sanctifying work.

Paul talks about the **secret** of being content. Listen to Jeremiah Burroughs at the end of his treatise on contentment in 1648. I don’t think things have changed. *“My brethren, to conclude this point. If I were to tell you that I could show you a way never to be in want of anything, I do no doubt but then we should have much flocking to such a sermon, when a man should undertake to manifest to people how they could never be in want anymore. But what I have been preaching to you now comes to as much. It countervails this and is in effect all one. Is it not almost all one, never to be in want, or never to be without contentment? That man or woman who is never without a contented spirit, truly can never be said to want much. Oh, the Word holds forth a way full of comfort and peace to the people of God even in this world. You may live happy lives even amidst all the storms and tempests in the world. There is an ark that you may come in to, and no men in the world may live such comfortable, cheerful and contented lives as the saints of God. Oh that we had learned this lesson.”*

I need to reference the use of one more word, namely the word “**content.**” Again, this is a word, like “learned,” that Paul rescued from non-Christian usage, for it was the word that described the self-sufficiency of the Stoics. However, Paul changes its meaning for clearly it now has to do with God-sufficiency, but nonetheless, there is an emphasis here on what is truly within him: the resident Holy Spirit, the abiding Christ, the kingdom of God. There is immediate provision for the circumstance and it is within, not because it is self-derived like the Stoics, but Christ-empowered like the saints. Paul could handle the freezing temperatures on the outside because of the heating on the inside. The ship was righted in the storm, not because of an array of external ropes and props but because of the ballast within. Paul is separating the Christian attitude of mind here from that of the Stoic: the bite your lip, tough it out, bear it and grin it syndrome. This is not about dogged RESOLUTION but about divine RELIANCE. It is utterly Christ-generated. Thus is not about toughing it out, but trusting it out. It is not about how we relate to the circumstance primarily, but how we relate to Christ.

Contentment is a wonderfully available learned behavior for the Christian. It doesn’t come through a crisis spiritual experience or by the laying on of hands. It does come as we learn to consciously and co-operatively, willingly and trustingly, moment by moment, submit to the disposals of God in our lives. There is indeed a way to give contented thanks on a discontented Black Friday!

Pastorally yours,

Stuart

*<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)*

## Announcements

### *MEN'S MINISTRY:*

- Save the date for our next COSC Men's Breakfast, December 5th from 9 - 10:30am. Kelly Doley Will be leading our discussion. Childcare will be provided.
- Save the date for the Men's Winter Retreat, January 30-31.
- If you want to be added to the Men's Ministry Distribution list of men's ministry activities and announcements email Matthew at [matthew.tropiano@navy.mil](mailto:matthew.tropiano@navy.mil).

### *WOMEN'S ADVENT EVENING:*

- We will be having our annual Advent Evening on December 7th. Join us at COSC at 7pm to prepare your heart for the celebration of the season. This is a great event to invite female friends, family or co-workers to come along.
- We need additional people to confirm they can bring hors d'oeuvres - please contact Emily Tangen at [etang03@yahoo.com](mailto:etang03@yahoo.com).
- Also, *in place of the Ornament Exchange, we will be collecting gently used winter clothing for 3 Strands Community Church that serves the homeless in NW.* We look forward to receiving your gently used scarves, mittens, hats, sleeping bags, blankets, jackets and new items like underwear and socks.

**CHRISTMAS DECORATING:** With Christmas quickly approaching, we need volunteers to help decorate the church on Sunday Dec 6. We will be hanging greens and wreaths in the sanctuary, fellowship hall, and on the front doors. Lunch will be provided! Please email the office if you can help.

**NIGHT OF PRAYER:** Join us for our monthly Night of Prayer for the Church and the city on Saturday, Dec 5th from 7 - 9 pm.

**CHRISTMAS SERVICE:** COSC will be holding it's annual Candle Light Christmas Service at 6pm on Saturday, Dec. 19. There will be no service on Sunday morning, Dec. 20th. Please bring a plate of goodies, ready to serve, to share after the service (sweet or salty!)

**BENEFIT CONCERT:** Capitol Hill Pregnancy Center will be hosting a benefit concert on Dec. 10, 2009 at 7:30pm at Washington Community Fellowship (9th and Maryland). The concert will feature local Christian artists. Free will donations accepted.

*For general questions or building use inquiries, send an e-mail to [office@christourshepherd.org](mailto:office@christourshepherd.org).*

*To communicate updates for the pastoral letter and/or the church bulletin, send an e-mail to [ben@christourshepherd.org](mailto:ben@christourshepherd.org). The church bulletin will be completed by end of day on Thursdays.*

## Bulletin Board

*Postings not officially sanctioned by COSC.  
Ads will be posted for up to 4 weeks. After that time period, please contact the church office to see if space will permit the ad to remain posted.*

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Newly finished, large 1 BD/1 BA basement apt. available at 10 & E NE beginning February 2010. 15 minute walk to Union Station and Eastern Market. Apartment includes full kitchen, full size w/d, natural light throughout, ample closet space, private back entrance. \$1700/month including all utilities (gas/heat, water, electric, wireless internet) and private parking space. Please contact Kristi Stofer at [kpstofer@gmail.com](mailto:kpstofer@gmail.com).

HOUSING AVAILABLE: Two rooms available for women in a 4 BR home on Rt. 50, 1 mile South of Clarenton. 2 full Baths, full kitchen, living room, dinign room, basement. Washer/Dryer and storage unit. Upstairs master BR available Jan. 1; smaller downstairs BR available mid Dec. Very reasonable rent. If interested, please e-mail [TheParsonageLadies@gmail.com](mailto:TheParsonageLadies@gmail.com).