

Sermon

October 15, 2022

Proper 23 year A

Philippians 4:1-9

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Good morning, St. Dunstan's!

Our epistle reading finds us today listening to St. Paul extend words of encouragement.

Here are words we need to hear,

especially today as our own anxieties are rising.

Everywhere we turn there seems to be a new global crisis.

Some of us are glued to our news sources,

listening to the latest happenings in the Middle East while wondering how this will affect us and our own world.

Some of us, our hearts bleed as we listen to crisis after crisis:

The earthquakes in Morocco and Afghanistan, Turkey, and Syria

The floods in Libya and China,

The Fires of Maui and all over North America.

What do I do when I feel overwhelmed by all anxiety?

Take a deep breath.

Reread our epistle.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.

⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

⁶Do not worry about anything,
but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses /exceeds **all** understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, 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. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Sometimes it may seem trite to say rejoice but, in the pain, and suffering that abounded around him, Paul was able to sincerely rejoice because he had this intimate relationship with God. Paul had confidence, trust, faith, and HOPE in God. Through Jesus!

He was SECURE in his knowledge of 'God is in control no matter what.'

With that knowledge he was able to have a deep, resounding, confident joy- not some giddy, syrupy, slogan seen on a bumper sticker type joy or the highway billboard shouting if you want to find Joy look here...

Paul wrote these words encouraging the real people to experience the joy he knew.

Through Paul's suffering, and our own anxiety and the tragedies in the world, God's steps closer to us, draws us in as a mother to her child in pain. Light shines brighter in darkness than in daylight.

Paul found joy in the shadows of his imprisonment knowing the darkness allowed others to see Jesus, the Light of the World, more clearly.

I love how the lectionary pairs our epistle reading with the much needed good news found in Psalm 23.

When you find yourself in difficult times with darkness drawing near, your close friends may come to you and try to lift your spirits. Some will say, “Cheer up! Everything is not so bad,” or “Why not look on the bright side?” Others will try to solve your problems for you offering well intended solutions. Out of caring for you, their instinct is to try and eradicate the darkness. This view, however, only gives more power to the darkness.

The good shepherd of Psalm 23 takes a different approach.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Our shepherd walks with us in the midst of our trials. The situations are not changed, but rather we are changed due to the comfort we receive with the gift of his presence.

This psalm begins by naming the Lord as our “shepherd” (v. 1). This shepherd leads us, his sheep, to things that are good for us.

In Today’s age shepherding is a little different.

Here’s an ad I found last night in ad to hire a shepherd general in New Zealand:

A BIT ABOUT YOU...

Our client is looking for a shepherd general with an interest and willingness to learn about regenerative principles.

The below are also key to success in this role:

- Great communication skills as you will be working closely with the manager.
- A competency in fencing, tractor driving and the use of side by sides.
- Experienced at handling stock as monitoring of stock weights and condition are an important part of the business.
- Show initiative and flexibility with the ability to work independently.
- A current restricted driver’s license at a minimum.

Our psalmist offers us a different sort of shepherd.

The psalmist offers the reader some vivid images:

- ♦ “green pastures” (v. 2),
- ♦ “still waters” (v. 2),
- ♦ and “right paths” (v. 3).

Interestingly, the shepherd does one thing that seems above and beyond the job description of any typical shepherd: he “restores my soul” (v. 3).

This shepherd provides more than mere protection, rest, and nourishment which are vitally important for survival.

It’s the soul part, he “restores my soul” that is the gift that he provides for life.

St. Paul knew these words of Psalm 23. Maybe this is what he had in mind as he offered his words to his beloved Philippians to first rejoice then pray.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.

The book of Acts tells us Paul was chained in a common holding cell in Philippi. Paul’s Roman citizenship meant he was eligible for a daily food allowance, but he depended on his friends and fellow believers to supply this food.

Paul is in prison, wrongfully accused.

We learned about rejection last week.

Paul could have let his rejection turn to REVENGE (a righteous revenge no doubt) but he didn’t.

Imprisonment carried with it a social stigma just like it does today. It would have been easy for the Philippians to turn their back on Paul at this point; instead, they remained faithful to him.

His joy in the Lord was contagious.

The contrast between Paul’s rather hopeless physical situation and his hopeful reaction echoes through the letter he is writing. It is one of the four prison epistles. This one to the Philippians becomes a message of joy. The word joy occurs 16 times its various forms throughout the letter.

Paul shows us how counter-cultural we Christians are to be and our response is....LoveForgivenessEncouragement, Joy - not revenge.

⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Ahhh, a perfect reminder of the gift of the presence of our Shepherd!

⁶Do not worry about anything,

but in everything

by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In other words,

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray.

Then, let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. God cares about you. God cares about what you concerns you.

Allow the shepherd to restore your soul.

Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, God's blanketing- like a being wrapped in your favorite quilt, will come and settle down some of that anxiety.

It really is incredible what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

Our last verse in this Psalms,

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long. Psalm 23: 6

The famous last verse is a comfort, but it seems to clash with reality.

Life shows that 'goodness and mercy' really don't follow anyone ALL the days of their lives. As seen with in all the chaos happening around us. There is always a mixture of good and evil that continually follow. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,"

To say anything else would be trite as in saying, "They lived happily ever after." However, the Hebrew word for "follow" may also be translated "pursue," and that changes the picture a little bit. God's goodness and mercy will chase after us even in the midst of chaos.

St. Paul gives us concrete advice on how we may be open to seeing God and finding God; St. Paul tells us what we need to seek in the midst of a crisis.

Look at Philippians 4v.8

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best
by filling your minds
and meditating on things

true,
noble,
reputable,
authentic,
compelling,
gracious—the best, not the worst;
the beautiful, not the ugly;
things to praise, not things to curse.

The things which came to you by my teaching and preaching,
and which you saw in me,
these things do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Combining these as a personal practice that with what Paul said in v6,
Verse 6 says-

⁶Do not worry about anything,
but in everything
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

I'm reminded of a song my grandfather used to sing. I can hear his voice in my head. I'm sure many of you are familiar with these lyrics:

Now let us have a little talk with Jesus,
Let us tell Him all about our troubles,
He will hear our faintest cry,
And He will answer by and by,
... And when you feel a little prayer wheel turnin'
And you will know a little fire is burnin'
Find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.

Sometimes we just need: a fresh perspective, I know I do.

May we always remember what we need is exactly what our collect or prayer of the day reminds us:
Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us.

Ahhhh.God's grace! What another gift!

Here's what I want to stay with you:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.