Attitude of Gratitude: Gratitude as Witness
Philippians 4:4-7
Sunday, November 22, 2026

The week before last I took a silent retreat. And I want to take the opportunity to thank our Staff Parish Relations Committee for encouraging me to do so and making it possible.

The spot I picked was an old, restored farmhouse out basically in the middle of nowhere. And it was quiet. The loudest noise was the occasional mooing of a cow, and the buzzing of the bees. Just me and God. It was an inexpressibly life-giving experience.

And you want to know one of my main takeaways from that week spent in silence? Just how loud our world is.

I reflected on my experience in Salado. In just the last four years that I've been here, things are so much noisier. More and more, bigger and bigger, and louder and louder vehicles everywhere. And even some of those little "golf carts" can be pretty loud. All the noise associated with the almost frantic home construction. And then there's the gradually intensifying drone of I-35 in the background.

And that's just if you're outside. Most of us have also built a wall of noise in our personal lives. At home, the TV is usually on, or there's music playing, or we're playing a video game, or, quite often, all of them at once!

Now, most of y'all are thinking, "I don't even notice the noise." And neither did I, until I experienced the opposite. Noise has become like the air we breathe: an ever-present part of our lives that we just take for granted.

But here's the thing. This constant noise isn't good for us. In fact, it's hurting us. The World Health Organization identifies noise pollution as the second most dangerous environmental toxin in the world, just after air pollution. Studies link noise to as long list of illnesses, including hypertension, anxiety, and depression. Noise stresses us out.

And it's not just the *fact* of the noise that's a problem. It's also the content. As I've discussed many times, the messages we are constantly getting from the TVs and the music and the video games and our social media are about fear. We're encouraged to be afraid of one another; there isn't enough to go around so it's either me or you. We're encouraged to be afraid that we don't have enough; that we aren't enough.

And all this noise, all this fear, is making us sick. It's causing our stress and anxiety to spiral out of control.

Now, as followers of Jesus, the Prince of **Peace**, we know this isn't how we're supposed to live. Yet we can't seem to help ourselves. So, what can we do?

This is the third and final week in our Attitude of Gratitude series. Thanksgiving is this Thursday. And to answer the question, let's look at Paul, the author of the letter to the Philippians.

Now, if anyone had reason to be anxious, it was Paul. Here's a list of some of the things he had to be anxious about during his ministry, from chapter 11 of his second letter to the Corinthians, verses 24-27:

"[24] Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; [26] on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; [27] in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked."

And if that wasn't enough, Paul wrote the scripture we just heard when he was under arrest, in Roman custody.

Yet he starts today's scripture with the word, "rejoice." And then, in case his friends missed it, he repeats it: "again I say, rejoice." And these aren't just words. Paul is speaking from his own experience. As he says elsewhere in this letter, *he himself* is rejoicing with them and for them, despite his captivity.

So, how is that even possible? With all Paul had experienced and was experiencing, how could he rejoice?

And I believe if we dig into this scripture, we'll find that Paul gives us the answer. And the key to rejoicing when the world tells us to be anxious is thanksgiving. Paul tells the Philippians, "in *everything* by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God." Regardless of the situation, in everything, pray to God, giving God thanks for all the ways God has blessed you. For instance, God has created you. God continues to

sustain you. God has saved you through Jesus. And God will take care of you, just like God took care of Paul throughout his travels, even in his Roman captivity.

What Paul is describing here is the attitude of gratitude we've been talking about the last few weeks. For Paul, gratitude was a spiritual practice, just as it is for us. The more we practice thanking God, the more reasons we find for thanking God, and the more reasons we find to be grateful, the more grateful we become. As we practice gratitude, we give the Holy Spirit room to work within us to transform us from the inside out, into the image of Christ.

And what Paul explains to the Philippians here is that as we are transformed—as gratitude does its work within us—we experience peace. And the peace isn't just the absence of conflict. No, it's a peace that transcends understanding. It doesn't make logical sense. It's the kind of Peace that Paul could experience in shipwrecks and beatings and prison. It's a peace that was independent of his current circumstances, because it was rooted in something much deeper: his eternal relationship with God.

And it's that peace that enables Paul to tell his friends to rejoice. Not just when things are going well, but to rejoice regardless of the circumstances. To "rejoice ***in the Lord***." To let that peace they've received from God express itself in joy.

And finally, Paul points out that this peace also expresses itself in gentleness. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone." Now, the Greek word for "gentleness" is a little tricky to translate. It could also be translated as yielding, lenient, moderate, forbearing, or reasonable. It's not insisting on your rights, or that you *are* right.

In fact, in chapter 2 of this letter, Paul has already instructed them on the need to be gentle. There, he put it in terms of having "the mind of Christ Jesus, who though in the form of God did not consider such equality as something to be exploited, but instead emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming human, and, being found in human form, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

That's where the spiritual practice of gratitude leads. Peace, joy, and gentleness, the mind of Christ. But as important as it was for Paul's friends in Phillipi to experience divine peace, joy, and gentleness in their own lives, it wasn't just for them. Paul tells them to make that new sort of life *known to everyone.*

And I think we know why he told them that. He told them that so that as they lived that peace, joy, and gentleness in a chaotic, despairing, self-serving world, people would notice, and want to get some of that for themselves.

And of course, Paul's words to those Philippians 2000 years ago apply just as well to us. We weren't made to live in anxiety. We were made to live in the same sort of peace, joy, and gentleness Paul is talking about here. And we get that peace, in large part, through the practice of gratitude.

And the beauty of it is, when we do get it, we don't just get to enjoy it for ourselves. We get to make it known to everyone. We get to share it.