

Sermon Pentecost 19A  
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant  
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon  
October 11, 2020

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, 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. 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. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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. Keep 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.

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Rejoice. Be gentle. Do not worry. Pray. Guard your hearts. I don't know about you, but I needed to hear these words of encouragement today. Then: Whatever is true, Whatever is honorable, Whatever is just, Whatever is pure, pleasing, commendable Excellent, worthy of praise Think about these things. When was the last time you thought about whatever was true, honorable, pleasing or excellent? Really? When was the last time you didn't wake up thinking about the ugly, sick and unjust things going on all around us, And go to bed thinking about them too? When was the last time you got a good night's sleep?

Peace? Ain't seen him. Not around here. Not right now! I wake up thinking about COVID. I spend my days making decisions pertaining to COVID. I go to sleep thinking about COVID. And when I'm not thinking about COVID, I'm thinking about the hot political mess we're in right now, or about racial injustice or about the unemployment crisis... I'll be the first to admit it is real hard for me to think about “whatever is excellent” right now.

Yes, there are the moments of joy - a family walk on a beautiful fall day, a phone call with a friend, being here, in worship, with you - but in between and surrounding all that, is this bath of stress, anxiety, unknowns, concerns, and all around political yuckiness that has grown to a fever-pitch as we head into the election. Reading this passage this week from Philippians really made me pause, Take a deep breath, and want to read those words again. So guess what? I'm going to share them again! Really listen to these words. Let them come over you like a healing balm this morning.

“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. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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. Keep 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.” Why do these words feel so absolutely necessary right now? Well if you were listening closely, you’ll realize that there is more to this passage than the verses I’ve been repeating to you.

These poignant and most needed words for us right now follow an admonition by Paul in this letter of two co-workers in the gospel to stop quarreling and start getting along. It’s easy to miss, because Paul has such a smooth way with words, but if we pay close attention, we can see that two leaders of the Church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, are at odds. What he says to his “beloved sisters and brothers” in that church is that is his fervent desire that Euodia and Syntyche would ritual unity again. And if they can’t “be of the same mind in the Lord,” Paul’s gonna need the reader to help them to be of the same mind. Paul must be responding to some dispute that was divulged to him through previous correspondence. And his answer is, you tell Euodia and Syntyche to figure it out, work it out, whatever they need to do to just get over it, “in the Lord.”

Disunity, Paul perceives, is the most dangerous threat to the mission of the gospel. If you’re going to be working side-by-side with one another for Christ, you’re going to have to get along. If your mission is the same, then your mind needs to be the same. And it needs to be set on Christ. In the words of *The Message* translation: “You’ll do best by filling your minds 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.” Meaning - not whatever the latest gossip is, not whatever the most insidious rivalry is, not whatever the biggest headline is. If you’re going to be on the frontlines for Christ, you gotta get your head in the game.

My personal devotions lately have been coming from the book of Romans. And I have been stuck for a week on this one passage in the 15th chapter: “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Harmony. Harmony is living in accordance with Christ Jesus. Harmony is what glorifies God. With one voice is how Christ so longs to hear our praise. Oh, Lord! Anything but Harmony. Ask anything of us right now, but don’t ask us to get along. There is so much to be divided over, There is so much to get angry about There are so many reasons for us to turn away from one another right now. Please, just let us be divided and be done with it?

Reflecting on this very passage from Philippians, theologian Ekaputra Tupamahu notes how “people in the United States are inhabiting two different worlds, watching different news cycles, hearing different radio talk shows, reading different newspapers. Echo chamber discussions with like-minded people are our main mode of political engagement. There is a serious lack of respectful dialogue between people with different views, different opinions, different ways of life.” Lord, please don’t ask us to come together. Please don’t ask us to talk with one another. Please don’t expect us to understand each other. It’s just so much easier to dig in our heels, and stay in those “echo chambers.”

Instead, we hear through Paul today, we can’t just stay in our own corners. We can’t just pack up our toys and go home when things don’t go our way. Because we are people on a mission. Paul reminds us: “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.” And what are those things? Sharing the good news. Welcoming in the orphan and the widow. Feeding the hungry. Turning the world upside down. People are hurting, people are hungry People need the good news of Jesus Christ, now more than ever. The world needs the people of God to respond, now more than ever.

Last month, 50% of renters in South Carolina reported they didn’t know how they were going to pay rent. Homelessness is on the rise here, and those who used to at least be able to count on finding a hot meal or a place to wash up have lately been met with shuttered doors. Opioid overdoses are up 50% in South Carolina compared to this time last year. The saving mission of Christ is calling to us to action, now more than ever. The mission of Christ needs our hands and our feet. And if our hands and feet are going to make any impact at all, They are going to have to work together. They are going to have to get on the same page. They are going to have to be of the same mind of the same spirit of the same heart in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, beloved, “if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Keep your mind on these things. Not on the gossip, on the distractions or on the divisions that will keep us further and further at odds, further from the mission that we bear. Keep your mind on Christ, “and the God of peace will be with you.”