

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**  
July 28, 2019  
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Philippians 4:10-20** I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

<sup>14</sup>Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup>Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup>for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. <sup>17</sup>Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. <sup>(NIV)</sup>

**“Joyful Generosity”**

Josie took a deep breath and paused right in front of the front door to her office. She knew she had to have a little chat with one of her coworkers and it wasn't going to be easy. Leah was super sweet, always on time, and a great new contribution to the team. But within hours after Leah was first hired, Josie started to sneeze. It wasn't a coincidence that her eyes started to water and get puffy, her nose started to run and her head felt full of pressure as she spent more and more time with Leah. The third day on the job, Josie couldn't help notice that Leah's otherwise impeccable professional outfit was completely covered in cat hair. Josie valued her new colleague for her attitude and contributions. But she wasn't willing to suffer physically when her allergies were triggered every time she was near her. She would have to have an honest conversation. She would have to be gentle, but firm; respectful, but unmistakable.

Later that week Josie sat in a coffee shop waiting for a friend to show up. She tried to contain her nerves. But every time she managed to take a deep breath and calm herself down, her mind started racing again about every conceivable response and reaction to the talk she was about to have. Michelle had been her best friend since high school. They had shared so much together over the years. Now that Josie had gotten engaged, she wanted to ask Michelle to stand up in the wedding with her and be her maid of honor. Josie knew Michelle would consider it an honor. But she also understood there were some serious responsibilities that came along with that honor. Most notably some burdens on Michelle's time and finances. She just hoped Michelle would be able to share

her joy for such a special day in her life.

Some difficult conversations that need to be made. They might be touchy subjects, but they need to be brought up and addressed and worked on to bring about a positive response. In Philippians chapter four, the Apostle Paul brings up some sensitive subjects with fellow believers. He is ending his letter to this group of Christians by highlighting their generosity. His joy is unmistakable. As he encourages them in their Christian faith, there are three main things we can take away from this section: 1) There is joy in receiving; 2) Christ's power enables Christians to carry out Christ's calling; and 3) God's people give generously for the good of God's kingdom.

### **1) Joy in Receiving**

What we first notice in this section of Philippians chapter four is an absence of awkwardness from Paul. Instead, his joy is obvious. In fact, he says: **"I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me."** (Philippians 4:10) He is filled with joy because he has personally experienced the generosity of fellow Christians. And it's not just a slight improvement over a shrug you might show when you get a card or note in the mail.

Sportsmanship teaches us how to be good sports when we win and lose. Christians can show joy when we give and when we receive. Sometimes we emphasize humility and modesty at the expense of celebrating the gifts we receive through whom God delivers those gifts. The Bible teaches us it's ok to find joy in the work of fellow Christians and celebrate the way God uses them to touch our lives. So we can express our joy at the people who have dedicated themselves to the work of teaching Sunday school or visiting the sick and homebound. We can put aside our fear of embarrassing someone who has done so much for our congregation and worked tirelessly behind the scenes for years. We can express appreciation that we are part of a national church where people we might never meet give gifts and offerings to support our work of sharing the gospel in the Four Corners. It's ok. It's healthy to express joy at all the blessings we receive from fellow Christians.

When Paul shares his joy over what the Philippian Christians have done for him, he doesn't make it uncomfortable. They have been thinking of him. They have been supporting his work. It's not only their generosity, but the experiences of life that have taught Paul contentment. Experiencing extremes have taught him he is always in the Lord's hands. Paul can show joyful generosity at receiving. He can also show joyful generosity at the power he sees at work in his life.

### **2) Power to Carry out the Christian Calling**

There are times when Christians suffer from a sort of inferiority complex. When it comes to working for our Savior and serving for the good of His kingdom we quickly think of many other people more qualified, more gifted, more naturally suited for God's plans and purposes than we are. And there certainly are children of God who are blessed in many more ways in far greater amounts who, according to our logic, would be able to accomplish more work in God's kingdom than we would.

There are other times when we tell God we don't have time for Him for the opposite reason. When other priorities nudge service to our Lord off our daily schedules, when

dedication to advancing the kingdom of God becomes an afterthought, something we'll get around to when we have the time, it's the opposite of inferiority. Just like those seventy-two disciples of Jesus who were dazzled by demonic powers submitting, but forgot about the bigger picture, we too often get caught up in ourselves. They lost track of the ultimate goal of their mission trip and were completely consumed by the powerful, awesome actions they were able to accomplish, as if they had overnight learned the secrets of a Jedi knight.

If we want the joyful generosity the Apostle Paul describes here, we need to better understand his power source. Let's take a look at one of the most misquoted and misunderstood verses in the Bible. Philippians 4:13 says: **"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."** Active Faith Sports has plastered this verse as a motto on athletic apparel. Here are the obvious abuses of this verse. If I think this will enable me to dunk a basketball or develop a devastating curveball. If you decide this will allow you to be the head of a Fortune 500 company or develop into the mogul of an international real estate empire. If the people you come into contact with come to expect that their willpower will force estranged family members to reconcile with them or wipe out their diabetes by the power of positive thinking.

It's a little awkward to point out that's not the real point of this verse. The actual sense is quite the opposite. Here's a better way to understand Philippians 4:13: **"In respect to all these circumstances, I am strong in the One who strengthens me."** Christ is strong. Christ is capable. Through Jesus you have the capacity to face all circumstances in life.

A proper sense of humility, not inferiority or overconfidence is key here. You can only appreciate when you come to realize you can't do it on your own. It's an uncomfortable conversation to admit your inabilities; tasks are beyond your ability to carry out, requests and demands placed on you by others are outside your reach. Humbling, but gets us connected to the one who can and did.

Christ didn't lead his life to gain attention and be amazing to the crowds. Jesus didn't show off to get Instagram followers or Facebook likes. Strength was seen in sacrifice. Power was put on bold display in weakness. Success was defined by the cross.

Jesus doesn't create a relationship with you so you could tap some inner source of strength to work on your deficiencies and build upon your strengths until you finally reach perfection. Jesus doesn't strengthen you so you eventually become holy and replace Him. Jesus strengthens you by letting you know He has done everything necessary, lived His life in absolute perfection, died shamefully on the cross, and upended death by his Easter resurrection. You are strong in your relationship with Christ. Connected to Christ puts his capacity to work in all circumstances of your life.

### **3) Generosity for the Good of God's Kingdom**

Who you are always begins with Christ. What you do always flows from your relationship with Christ. When you look at your life from that perspective, it will be a healthy corrective to feelings of inferiority or overconfidence.

Psychologists and best-selling authors are advocating the practice of gratitude. They

describe ways you can be grateful for what you have and who you are. They describe health benefits such as reduced stress, increased optimism and even brain changes when you make a regular habit of practicing gratitude.

For Christians we can be grateful that these people have uncovered insights into ways God has wired our brains and our bodies. But we can take it one step farther. Paul was able to take a step back and acknowledge the prayers, gifts, and support he received from fellow Christians. Giving expresses the living bond by which the Christian is united with God and with our fellow Christians. Paul recognized it was accomplishing God's good purposes for his kingdom.

God's kingdom is simply this: his gracious rule in human hearts during this life and extending into the next life. In this sense, gratitude is not an equalization or balancing out of all material or physical resources. But rather simply an acknowledgment that Christians have overflowing blessings through our relationship with our Savior. God's people in another part of God's kingdom were growing in their spiritual relationship with the God who gave himself for them. They grew to see the world from a kingdom perspective. They tapped into the gifts God had given them to put them to work to expand God's kingdom.

You might not have the same gifts or as much money as some other Christians. But our generosity has a larger kingdom perspective. When we talk about synod subsidy or church budgets, it's just dollars and cents. It's about enabling new churches to be planted and the Gospel spread in new areas. You have brothers and sisters here at Christ the Rock who can partner with you to use your strengths together with their strengths to help build up our church family. We get to partner with brothers and sisters across our synod to support gospel work in foreign countries, new church plants in neighboring states, and training the next generation of church workers. It all ultimately serves to give glory to God. Those riches of grace and mercy won't run out when we share them with those who don't yet know Jesus.

God wants to sit down with you have a talk. God wants to prepare your heart for a sensitive subject. But it's not awkward or painful. It's joyful. In joy God has chosen to give you a relationship with his Son your Savior. Through that connection to Jesus we receive more blessings than we can even inventory. Christ supplies all our needs, spiritual and physical. Connected through Christ to fellow Christians, we see opportunities to use the gifts God has given us for a greater kingdom purpose. Those connections are key for showing joyful generosity in our lives. Amen.