

**Service for Zion - October 7 – Thanksgiving, World Communion Sunday**

**Hymns:** Hymns: 338 – Let All Things Now Living; 802 – For the Fruits of All Creation; 534 – All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly; In Thanksgiving Let Us Praise Him

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:4-13; 4:19-20

**Sermon Title:** “How Can I Have Faith?” – *Rev. Douglas Rollwage*

**Philippians 4:4-13; 19-20 - New Living Translation**

*Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*

*How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

*And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*

*Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever! Amen.*

How can I have faith? How can I have the kind of faith that will transform my life, will change the very core of who I am, will help me rise above the day to day frustrations, the aches and pains, the disappointments, the bad news, the anxieties, the despair? How can I have the kind of faith that enables me to rise above my circumstances, and keep my heart and my mind at peace?

Astonishingly, we've just heard how. The words Paul has written here – from the very depths of his heart – may have just washed over us without sinking in, but in these words is the key to the kind of life we are longing for, the kind of faith we are seeking, the peace that will transform the very nature of who we are. We need these words to take root, to take control, to take over, to change us from the inside out, into the people we so long to be. So listen again to these life-changing words:

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Did you hear them? Did you listen? Did you take them in, did you understand what's on offer here? Just to make sure, let's try them in a "repeat after me" way, like at a wedding. Most people pay attention to the vows they make at their wedding, or at least I hope they do, so maybe this actually works. Let's try it:

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Did you get it that time? Did you hear? If you did, what do you think? Do you think your life would be changed, and for the better, if you were to "*experience God's peace?*" If the primary characteristic of your life was not worry, or anxiety, or fretting, or depression, or anger, or desire, or frustration, or despair, or inadequacy, or loneliness, but the kind of deep-rooted faith that brings peace? A peace which "*guards our hearts and minds*" against all that might tear us down? A peace "*which exceeds anything we can understand?*" How would you like a faith like that? How would you like a peace like that? How would you like a life with faith at its centre, with peace at its core?

Maybe you think a faith like this is just wishful thinking, or empty platitudes, or a false promise. Maybe you think Paul is just blowing hot air. Maybe you think if Paul actually faced some of the struggles you're going through, he wouldn't make such claims.

Well, first of all, Paul isn't writing these words from an ivory tower, or from the lap of luxury, or from a life based on theory, not on practice. Paul is writing from prison. In fact, he's in a Roman prison, not the most comfortable form of accommodation, where the level of care consists of "lock the door and throw away the key." If you are in a Roman prison and you don't have friends to help you, to bring you food, medicine, clothing; well, you're going to have a very bad, very short incarceration, which will end with your very welcome death.

Paul, thankfully, has help; the very Philippians to whom this letter is written have sent a helper for Paul and money to meet their expenses. Money can buy better accommodations, can buy better food, can buy a change of clothing or two, but there's

nowhere near enough money to buy Paul's freedom. Paul, you see, is waiting for a trial before the Emperor. It is a capital trial, meaning it could end in Paul's death. And it is a trial before the insane Nero, which means it most likely will.

Sadly, the helper the Philippians have sent, Epaphroditus, has himself fallen ill, near-to-the-point-of-death ill, likely from jail sickness (you can imagine the kind of disease just coating the slimy walls of a Roman prison) or from one of the many plagues and fevers which constantly ravaged the overcrowded city, fevers for which Epaphroditus, from far-away Philippi, had no immunity.

Not only that, but Paul's life up to this point had not been one of single-malt whiskey, swimming pools and cigars. Paul, since the moment of his miraculous conversion, hadn't had it easy. Struck blind, he slowly regained his sight, perhaps never completely. His previous career of persecuting Christians made folks leery of his sudden Christian faith, and he faced many years of isolation before any of the Apostles would even meet with him. All indications are that Paul's family, including the wife he (as a good Pharisee) most likely had, regarded him as dead for leaving the Jewish faith, never to speak to him again. And that was just the beginning of his troubles.

"You think you've got problems?" writes Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23-27):

*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

And now he's in prison, now he's in chains, now he's soon to die, and knows it, and is sending his sickly companion back home to Philippi, with a letter of thanks for their help, a letter of encouragement for their faith, a letter containing the core of his faith, faith which filled the heart within his broken body, and given him, in the face of all his struggles, a deep and unshakeable core of peace. "I have learned how to be content with whatever I have," he writes. "I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ,

*who gives me strength. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.”*

So these words we read this morning are not written lightly. These words we read this morning are words born out of the harshest experience possible, out of a life of struggle and hardship and loneliness and pain, but out of a heart deeply infused with unshakeable faith, with a peace that nothing could take it away. So listen to these words again; in fact, say them with me:

*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Paul knew these words to be true. He lived the reality of this astonishing promise. And the same promise is there for you. The same offer. The same faith. The same peace. And it turns out, that faith, that peace, is based entirely upon gratitude. Entirely upon thanksgiving. Entirely upon living each day with hearts open to God's grace, consciously thankful for every good thing, consciously thankful for God's undying care, consciously thankful for what God has done for us, is doing for us, will do for us; that we are surrounded by God's love, which will never let us go.

Communion is a powerful reminder of that love. As we gather to re-enact the Last Supper, we are called to remember the sacrifice of love which God, in Christ, made on our behalf. His body, his life, given for us. For you. For me. His death instead of ours; his resurrection that we too might never die. “*Every time you do this,*” said Jesus, “*remember me.*” “*Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup,*” writes Paul, “*you proclaim – you remember – that Jesus died for you.*” And so we rise from this table in faith and in thanksgiving for all that the Lord has done. Does. Will do. For you. For those you love. Forevermore.

How can we have faith? *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. God's peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Take these words – hear these words – live these words – and this same God who took care of Paul “*will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.*”

*Now all glory to God our Father forever and ever!” Amen.*