

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
October 29, 2017
Philippians 4:4-13
Noble Reasons to Rejoice in the Lord Always
Rev. George Ferch

Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

There lies a vast canyon between happiness and rejoicing. Happiness is a feeling someone or something creates, as in, “He makes me happy,” or, “This does not make me happy.” Rejoicing is an action of the will. Our ability to mimic the apostle’s exhortation “Rejoice in the Lord always,” lies in our adopting his outlook toward being “content whatever the circumstances.”

There are noble reasons for rejoicing and contentment. These reasons are much greater than the superficialities that make us happy or not. Take a look with me at those **Noble Reasons to Rejoice in the Lord Always**. The Lord is near. The peace of God will guard our hearts. We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

The Holy Spirit thought his exhortation was worth stating twice through Paul’s pen. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” The Lord Jesus is near as he fills all things. He is near as he fulfills his promise to be with us always to the very end of the age. Jesus also is near in that his return to gather the remnant of his church and takes us into heaven with those already there is imminent.

In this context and expectation we let our gentleness, our reasonableness, be evident to all. There is no need for harshness, no need to be unreasonable with others. There is no need to be anxious, fearful, about anything. Instead of filling our heads and hearts with worry, we think about God’s promises and blessings. These are noble, right, pure, and admirable. These are praiseworthy.

We spend our time in prayer often petitioning our present Lord for our needs. With thanksgiving we present our requests to God who is with us rather than distant and uncaring. We go to him with present needs based on his constant attention to our needs in the past. God’s proximity and his command to pray and promise to answer are noble reasons to rejoice in the Lord always.

The second noble reason the apostle gives to rejoice in the Lord always is the peace of God will guard our hearts. We call these words the Votum. Pastors often use them after the sermon. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” It is the preacher’s promise to you that the good news that Jesus Christ is our Savior in whose cross we have forgiveness and eternal life will guard your hearts and minds against temptation and sin so no one can rob you of your faith.

The peace of God is our reconciliation, our right relationship with God in Christ. It is the power of God for our salvation, as Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. Paul promises us in connection with the first part of our sermon, “And the God of peace will be with you.”

The Philippians had received and learned this gospel from Paul. They had witnessed him rely on that peace he had in Christ to be content whatever the circumstance, including his current house arrest in Rome.

Peace in God in Christ is not a mere feeling. It is our guardian. It is the objective reality of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of God’s eternal son come into the flesh as our substitute. It is the subjective reality of our faith that guards our hearts as the peace of Christ comes to us in Word and sacrament.

The apostle exhorts the Philippians and us to put all that into practice. How? Rejoice in the Lord always. There is constant cause for rejoicing in our lives as Christians because the peace of God is constant. It transcends, surpasses, our human understanding which assures us of its heavenly birthplace.

Paul appreciated the Philippians concern for him with their gifts. At the same time, he was able to rejoice in the Lord always because he knew he could do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

Contentment based on happiness is a house of cards ready to fall with the slightest puff of wind. Contentment built on the strength Christ gives-our peace with God, the power of prayer, the promises and blessings on which to focus- enables me to know the secret to true contentment. That secret is not to rely on self or constantly check if I have plenty or little. Contentment is not if someone or something makes me happy or not. The secret to contentment is satisfaction through trust in the power of Christ who gives me strength through the power of his rule in my heart.

You and I have every noble reason to rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice. The Lord is near. We are at peace with God. We have the power of Christ to be content whatever the circumstances. Amen. <SDG>