



Sermon: The Peace Feast - Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

Sunday 10:15 am – October 23rd, 2011 – At Living Hope Lutheran Church

Sermon Text:

Philippians 4:4-13 New International Version 1984 (NIV1984)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² 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. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.



Sermon: The Peace Feast

Pentecost-19 Sunday – 10:15 am – October 23rd, 2011 – **Pastor Todd Goldschmidt**

“I’m going to let you in a little *secret* . . .” You glance around, lean in toward the speaker, and eagerly anticipate the words he or she is about to whisper in your ear. “What’s your *secret*?” a reporter asks a perennially successful athlete who seems to rise above the fray each and every day, overcoming injuries and setbacks, seemingly taking his or her few losses in stride and almost always coming out on top. “Wow, this desert is amazing! What’s that flavor I’m tasting? It’s delicious!” “Oh, it’s just my own little *secret* ingredient . . .” “Holy cow! How’d you do that?” you ask your friend who just performed a baffling card trick right before your eyes. “I could tell you my *secret*,” he replies, “but then I’d have to kill you.”

“What’s your *secret*, Paul?” asks a 1st century member of the congregation he founded in the Macedonian city of Philippi. “How can you be so calm, cool and collected after all that you’ve endured?” Paul replies in the words of our text. He invites us to come with him to Christ’s Peace Feast where we’ll find the richest of fare for our souls. The feast is ready, the banquet hall prepared and the Master determined to fill it with His invited guests.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” What a startling summons that is for us: to find joy even in the most difficult of situations. How does that square with that other verse in God’s Word that tells us to “Mourn with those who mourn”? How can that thought be reconciled with Jesus’ reaction when He “wept” at the death of His dear friend, Lazarus while those who observed His tears whispered in admiration, “See how much He loved him?” Can the Apostle Paul be so cold and callous that he would tell us to rejoice at the funeral of a friend or family member? And yet, if we really stop to think about it, isn’t that what a Christian funeral or memorial service *should* be? Shouldn’t it be a joyful celebration of victory over death and the certain hope of eternal life at our Lord’s side in the mansions of His Father’s house? We weep. But we do not weep like unbelievers who do not share our hope in Christ.

Paul doesn’t stop there. He continues, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” The Lord is near. He sees our suffering and hears our cries for deliverance even as He did with His people Israel in Egypt. He fights our battles for us just as He fought His people’s battles in the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. The miracles He employs in our lives to accomplish His work and carry out His saving will may not be as spectacular as they were in the days of Moses or at the time when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine, but they’re no less real. And they ought to be no less comforting. If you stop to think about it, we don’t deserve one iota of God’s grace. Not one! And yet He did far more than just observe our plight from a distance. He entered our human condition in the Person of His only Son, who “tented for awhile among us.” Jesus took on our flesh & blood, He bore our sin & guilt; He endured the hell we had coming and

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died the death we deserved. Yet He did even more. He hallowed our grave and assured us through the power of His bodily resurrection that we, too, will rise again on the Last Day!

We have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” How does that “living hope” look in our day-to-day lives? Paul invites us: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Brothers and sisters, turn your worries into prayers! Lift up your hurts to the Lord so that He can heal them! Cast all your anxiety, stress and fears on Him. He cares for you and values you above everything else in His Creation! Doesn't that astound you? It amazes me every time I reflect on God's love for me, when I think about what He was willing to do in order to ensure my forgiveness & eternal salvation. So I come to Him, as the hymnist puts it, “weak & heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care.” I turn those burdens over to the Lord who promises to work all things out for my good as one who is loved by Him and called according to His purpose. If anyone understands what it is to bear a heavy cross for the sake of the gospel, it's our crucified Savior. Jesus knows our every weakness, even before we call on Him in prayer. And yet He graciously invites us to come to Him and pour out our hearts to Him, with the blessed assurance that He not only hears those requests but that He will answer them in the way that is best for us.

And what's the result? “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus.” Like a sentry standing guard in a combat zone, watching for the enemy to approach so that he can sound the warning call to arms, God's Spirit stands guard over our souls. He reaches into our lives with the loving assurance that we are His baptized sons and daughters, clothed in the robe of His Son's righteousness, washed white in the blood of the Lamb. He beckons us bi-monthly to approach His table in repentant faith, united with one another in our adherence to each and every one of His divine doctrines to the best of our abilities, there to receive together with the bread and the wine His Son's true body and blood: the blood He shed and the body He gave up in His death on Calvary's cross. In His Holy Supper we receive strength for our faith, assurance of our forgiveness & the grace to lead a God-pleasing life. What peace floods our souls—peace that only Christ can give—through Word & Sacrament!

Now that we've been blessed to believe in Jesus and to receive His peace that transcends all human comprehension, we have a calling: a calling to walk in ways that are in keeping in step with His Spirit. And so Paul urges us as he urged the Philippians so long ago: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Instead of focusing on our pain and suffering; rather

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than reflecting on all of the evil that is so prevalent in our world and despairing over the injustice we see all around us; we turn our thoughts toward heavenly things and center our minds on God's many comforting and reassuring promises. We live our lives to His glory and to the good of others even with our small gestures of kindness. Then we rest securely in God's peace!

And so Paul concludes our text for today: "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. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Paul's answer to that 1st century believer's question as to the source of his peace is so simple, yet so deeply profound: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Paul didn't look to his own life for strength. He knew that he was extremely weak by nature. Once he lamented, "what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing . . . What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:19, 24-25). Only through his faith in Christ could the great ambassador for the gospel find solace and strength, comfort and hope, peace and well-being. & so it is with us. If we try to overcome temptation apart from Christ, we fail miserably. Or, if we do succeed in doing so, we give ourselves a self-righteous pat on the back. Either way, Satan has us right where he wants us: looking inward at ourselves rather than outward at our Savior.

We need to take a page out of Paul's playbook if we're going to learn his secret of contentment. Like him, we need to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God," as the writer of Hebrews urges us to do, and "consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that we don't grow weary and lose heart" (12:2-3). Our risen Savior has prepared an everlasting banquet for us in heaven. But, in the meantime, He continues to invite us each and every day, "Come to my Peace Feast." "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Amen