**October 15, 2023 Philippians 4:1-13**

***Practicing Joy***

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:1-13 NRSV

*(1)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. (2)I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. (3)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. (4)Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. (5)Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. (6)Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7)And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8)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. (9)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. (10)I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. (11)Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. (12)I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. (13)I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Pursue*** the presence of God in our lives.
   1. Prioritize ***prayer***.
   2. Cultivate ***unity***.
   3. Embrace ***accountability***.
2. Guard our ***thoughts***.
   1. Choose ***gratitude***,
   2. Focus on the ***good***.
   3. Seek God’s ***peace***.
3. God is shaping our ***actions***.
   1. Practice ***virtuous*** living.
   2. Engage in ***positive*** influences.
   3. Follow Christ’s ***example***.
4. Focus our ***sites*** upon the Lord.
   1. ***Learn*** from Jesus.
   2. Have ***confidence*** in yourself.
   3. ***Live*** in the fullness of God,
   4. ***Stand*** in the strength of Christ.

**Script:**

We live in a world that is falling apart around us; or at least that is what we are being told. If we listen to the news, we hear of all the disasters that are experienced in this world every day. If we listen to the conspiracy theorists there is a group of people who are conspiring to destroy the United States and some of them are in our very own government; there are people in other countries trying to steal your money; and the government is listening to your phone calls to make sure you are not part of these conspiracies. Now I do not know which of the theories are right or not; but I do know that there are more false theories than there are real confirmed conspiracies.

Every day, we hear warnings that the sky is falling, Chicken Little is running to and fro warning everybody. Tele-evangelists are warning that the second coming of Christ could be any day; some are even bold enough to tell us the day and time. And if we look at the signs given to us in scripture, they could be right. But Jesus has not come yet, and scripture tells us that we should be in the world but not of the world; Jesus’ own parables teach us to be prepared for His return; but if I am not mistaken, he tells us to keep working toward the harvest until we hear the trumpet sound.

Have you heard the trumpet sound? Have you looked to the eastern sky and seen the Son of Man coming? Have you seen Jesus descending from heaven to take his church away from this world? No, as of right now, if I am standing here sharing this with you, he has not yet come. I hear the prayers of the saints saying “How long oh Lord must we wait.” But maybe our prayer needs to change. Maybe the cry of our saints should be Lord I am ready for you to come again; lead me to those who need my help; lead me to help as many of my friends, family and neighbors to come with us into your kingdom.”

What can we do while we wait, what can we do that would be of service to God’s kingdom until His return takes place? What should our attitudes and actions be? Today in our sermon passage we will read a portion of a letter written from Paul. It is written to the members of the church in Philippi. Here he will give them advice on how to act, where to look, and what to do, until the day comes that the Lord returns. Join me in the reading of God’s word and our passage from Philippians 4:1-13:

*(1)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. (2)I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. (3)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. (4)Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. (5)Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. (6)Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7)And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8)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. (9)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. (10)I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. (11)Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. (12)I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. (13)I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:1-13 NRSV*

What should we do, in the here and now? IN our previous series we spoke of the grace of God. And how it is meant to be used in and through us. We spoke of prevenient grace, the grace that goes before us to lead us into a relationship with Jesus. We spoke of Saving grace, the grace that was released through the sacrifice of Christ so that all may be saved of their sin. We spoke of sanctifying grace, the grace that helps us to realize we are unable to live a holy life without the power of the Holy Spirit and we surrender to the Holy Spirit allowing Him to have control over your life and actions. And finally, we spoke of sustaining grace, the grace that continues to nurture us, allowing us to grow and mature in our faith, striving for Christian Holiness.

Matthew Henry writes, “*The believing hope and prospect of eternal life, should make us steady and constant in our Christian course. There is difference of gifts and graces, yet, being renewed by the same Spirit, we are brethren. To stand fast in the Lord, is to stand fast in his strength, and by his grace*.” In other words, the promise of our eternal home in heaven with the Lord, should create in us not only a desire, but a passion to be about the Lord’s business while we are living in this world. Part of this passion should include pursuing the presence of God in our everyday life; guarding our thoughts against anything that may lead us astray; and, shaping our actions to be more Christlike.

So what does that mean? How do we go about those three things? And, where do we start? First, we start with pursuing the presence of God in our lives. It begins with the saving grace of Jesus; from there we begin to change the things we do to start striving to hear from the Lord in our daily lives. We must begin to prioritize prayer. Develop a prayer time, a time when you are able to be alone with the Lord and just pray. Prayer consists of speaking to the Lord, but it also includes listening. And as we listen, we begin to hear his voice more and more, His voice becomes familiar to us and we soon begin a dialog that goes with us throughout our daily life, one that is consistent and meaningful.

While we prioritize prayer, we also cultivate unity. We come alongside other believers, most often those who are a part of your church congregation, but it is not limited to only those in your church. This is where discipleship thrives in your life. In this unity you begin to learn from others and others will learn from you. Here you develop a rapport with other believers and you work out what it means to be a Christian in your eyes. In unity, you not only become a part of the church family, but you may also find your place in the work of the kingdom.

As we develop an understanding of the church family you begin to embrace accountability. As you embrace accountability you will find others within your church family that you can open up with and share with who will help hold you accountable for your actions, words and deeds. They will have the freedom to tell you when you do something that is not right. They will actually be given the responsibility to tell you. IN doing so they are correcting your walk and they are helping to make you more like Christ. You must be willing to hear these words of accountability and strive to make the necessary changes in your walk, but also, you will find others that will trust you to hold them accountable.

Let me add this little side note here as well; many will feel as if when they are being held accountable, they are being judged. In fact, I have heard it said many times that many churches are judgmental. We have been accused of being judgmental, ourselves. I tend to think that this is the result of one party not being ready to accept accountability, and the other party being too direct and critical of those we are holding accountable. We must pray that the Lord will guide our thoughts and give us understanding when we are being held accountable, as well as the ability to hold others accountable in a gentle and loving way.

This brings us to Guarding our Thoughts. When we have a positive attitude and an optimistic viewpoint we are able to guard our thoughts better. We must choose gratitude, that’s right we must begin by choosing an attitude of gratitude. Everyday focusing on the things that you are grateful for. Look around and see the things that bless you each day.

In other words, we must focus on the good. As we choose an attitude of gratitude and focus on our blessings, we soon find ourselves seeking God’s peace. When we are not busy sucking the joy out of every situation we may find that our lives are not really all that bad. That is how we guard our thoughts. As we continue to grow, we will soon find that God is shaping our actions. Yes, a lot of shaping our actions is through our decisions, but when we are in a constant dialog with God, working to be unified with the church, and being held accountable; it's not near as difficult to choose gratitude, it's not a struggle to see good in our world, and finding God’s peace.

These actions naturally lead to our actions being shaped. We soon find that we are able to practice virtuous living. Virtuous living is living our lives in the model of Jesus Christ. We find it easier to love those around us, we find that forgiveness is not near as difficult as it once was, and before long we are even able to recognize the traits of Jesus in our actions and words. Here is when we are able to begin engaging in positive influence. I have said it many times but I stand by my statements. Many times, the greatest sermon we can ever preach, is not done with words, but is done through our actions. People watch us, and they see our example of how we demonstrate the love of Jesus to those we encounter, those we may have known for years or even to a total stranger. We can be a positive influence on the generations of children and young people who encounter us on a daily basis.

Being a positive influence is as simple as following Christ’s example. We look at the life of Christ and we really are able to see how he lived for an estimated three years. But during his adult life and the three years of His ministry we get glimpses of his compassion, his devotion to God the Father, and His love for the people he encountered. Even when he encountered the Pharisees and those who persecuted Him he was patient and willing to teach and train them, all in an attempt to draw them closer to the intent of God.

So as I look at this passage today, I am encouraged, and my hope is to encourage you as well. The secret to practicing joy is to “*…celebrate God all day, every day, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, striving to work with them and not against them. Help them see that Jesus is about to arrive, and He could show up any minute! Don't agonize or worry; instead pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know the things you are concerned about. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life*.”

We all have struggles, we all have difficult times, and we all get discouraged from time to time but if we focus our sites upon the Lord of our life, we will soon be able to see past the troubles we face and onto the glory that the Lord has in store for each of us.

SO we need to be focused on what is good, if its is not good then away with it. We need to be focused on what is true, this world is full of deceit, people who lie right to your face and think you are gullible enough to believe their lies; so if it is not true then be done with it. We must focus our lives upon being honorable, just, and pure.

Live your life in the right way, the way Christ teaches us. fix your mind on things that are pleasing, commendable, and worthy of praise to the Lord. Do not dwell upon the negative, dwell on whatever the Lord is able to use for His glory, dwell on these things.

I urge each of you to do the things we are able to learn from Jesus. Use the things you have seen demonstrated by your brothers and sisters of the church, things that have worked for them in their Christian walk; learn from them. And finally, today I stress this above all other things; have confidence in yourself. Like Paul I have learned what is to be in need, and at the same time, I know what it is like to be extremely blessed, I have had little and I have had plenty; Be content in whatever situation you find yourself.

The Lord provides what we need; so when you have little, know that you have what you need. Learn that the secret to living a joyous life is to live in the fullness of God, trusting in all that he takes you to, and all that he brings you through. Paul says it best in verse 13, “*I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13 NRSV)*” Stand in the strength of Christ, stand on the promises of God, and boldly go where he calls you to go, being his hands and feet.