

WELCOME 22nd October 2023 – 21st Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Philippians 4:1-23

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...

As we move into this week...A 2018 Daily Telegraph survey on contentment found

- **65%** of Australians --- getting all their housework done yields contentment
- **73%** of those surveyed --- alcohol was their preferred path to contentment
- **14%** said sex helps them feel content and
- surprisingly **6%** listed birdwatching as a contentment-inducing activity

There were other answers scattered throughout the surveys but you see the trend... It appears many equate contentment w/ achievement or w/ enjoyable experiences... Contentment, to many in our world, is circumstantial or conditional...we do it or not.

How different from **the** Scriptures...

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, & thank him for all he has done

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.

His peace will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

True joy & contentment are only found in a relationship with Jesus. As David wrote 100s of years **earlier**... *The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.*

True contentment & genuine joy are ours...in every circumstance or condition because Jesus is our Shepherd & we are his forever.

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd & you have promised contentment & fullness of life to all who trust you. We trust that in you we lack nothing, & rest, refreshment & restoration are your daily gifts to us. Lead us now & every day to seek joy & satisfaction only in you...in your Name we pray...Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

- 1 What does the word "contentment" mean to you?
 - Scale of 1 (low) & 10 (high) How contented are you? Why?
- 2 When you have a "quieter" moment & are able to think about life, what do you think?
When your mind is free to think, what do you think? Daydreams? Private chats?

21 PENTECOST '23 A – THE PANDEMIC OF JOY: CONTENTED JOY

Bob was a very successful restaurant mgr in the Brinker Int'l chain. In the 10 or so years he/family worshipped w/ us in Nth Tx he led 3 marginal Chili's locations into superior performance. At 2 of those locations I got to be part of his "soft openings" where invited guests helped train his staff up to his std. It was tremendous fun getting to eat whatever he wanted his cooks to learn how to prepare & to see him help the wait staff learn to balance large trays of hot food/cold drinks w/o spilling a drop or fumbling a french fry. His message was always the same: "Watch where you're going not what you're carrying." To this day, when food or drinks are heading for my table, I'm watching their eyes. If there's too much focus on the tray...I get nervous...might catch my coffee in my lap.

Insurance actuaries say something similar about new car collisions or reports of damage. A large %age of new-car-damage claims occur in the 1st 2-3 months off the lot...many as they leave the lot. Why? Because new car owners often drive away in their shiny new vehicle thinking, "Don't hit anything! Don't hit anything! Don't..." Their intense focus on the potential of collision almost wills them into a collision. If you watch what you're carrying (new car don't crash) instead of where you're going...you increase the potential for disaster & rob yourself of genuine joy & contentment... Having said that let's catch up on what we've seen so far.

For all the world, Paul looks like he's in the midst of a disaster...Roman prison w/ his life on the line. But from the outset, his letter to the church in Philippi erupts in JOY...thankful purposeful eternal & contented joy. How does that joy arrive/flourish? Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. In all my prayers, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. Joy is not built upon circumstance but on the life/death/rez/rule of Jesus. Joy is granted by & grows from the good news that the Philippians trusted w/ their whole lives & to which they committed themselves w/ Paul AND joy lives for that uncertain moment when Christ will return to claim all his own back for all eternity. Paul says we can trust where we're going because every moment; beginning TO end are held solidly in God's eternal desire to redeem us from sin/death/evil by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross - every moment; beginning TO end are Christ's to accomplish secured in Jesus' saving love for all & his life given to free us for life in him.

Then Paul calls us to grow in imitating Christ's mind/heart so that as his church our lives give witness to what has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit...and then is poured out in compassionate courageous witness & service to others.

Then fulfil my joy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, & working together with one mind & purpose... Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked & perverse people. Hold firmly to the word of life Joy is grounded in Christ & grows to fulfilment as it is poured out for others everywhere we are every day we live & as we put to death every sort of shortcut, sidetrack, roadblock, or detour so that what we enjoy is a unity & oneness w/ each other & a likeness to Jesus himself. "...everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ & become one with him." Anything that big notes me has to go so I can make much of Jesus.

Therefore, my dear brothers & sisters, stand firm in the Lord. Therefore? What's it there for? Paul is pointing back to the end of chap 3... "...we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Saviour. He will take our weak mortal bodies & change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control." "Therefore...stand firm in the Lord. Which means...Don't lose sight of the destiny/destination but don't forget you still have a long way ahead of you until then...Our eternal assurance embraced in the arms of Christ is never in doubt...but until then...3 things: stand firm in Jesus which means Strengthen the fellowship...Seek God's peace...Set your minds on God's good gifts

Strengthen the fellowship Now I appeal to Euodia & Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement & the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life. Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see your gentle graciousness in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

I honestly don't know why Paul calls out the rift b/t these 2 women who were clearly dear to him...other than they needed to address their fractured relationship & Paul wants the community to help. How we stand before God is directly related to how we stand in relation to others, especially in our community. Paul can't just turn a blind eye here. He doesn't tell them to shake hands & make up; rather he wants them to hear what he's said all along & live what they know to be true. He wants them to start displaying the virtues & habits of Christ. Notice Paul doesn't take sides. This isn't about helping someone win; this is about living the gospel. For Paul, everything is connected. He pleads that this relationship be reconciled because if you are living in light of eternity, living as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, repentance/forgiveness/restoration should be your natural response. What do you do w/ your anger? Do your resentments fester? Does it display your child of God-ness to hold a grudge or replay a hurt you experienced years ago? No.

Paul commends a life of unity in which we learn to forgive one another. In fact, he says we need to do something more than simply stop it. He says replace your resentment w/ different affections all together. *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see your gentle graciousness in all you do...Strengthen the fellowship...don't leave it broken...as far as it depends on you live @ peace w/ all people.*

Seek God's peace...Remember, **the** Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, & thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus. Corrie **ten** Boom... "Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength. Worrying doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it robs today of its strength." Replace that worry & the robbery it effects on you in this moment w/ prayer...about everything.

Sometimes we can feel safe & sassy & satisfied *until*...we see someone else has something we've always wanted or we see that we don't have something we've always wanted...which means we're staring at the tray not the table where it goes. Then we work harder – fret more plan more control more complain more sleep less. Prayer is submission not control...prayer hands over the reins to God while I live the reality of my praying right now. So every day...sometimes many times a day I talk it out w/ God...tell him what I need & thank him for what I have...Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Pay attention to Paul's choice of words...he uses a military term...peace is not the absence of difficulty or challenge or even struggle, but the presence of God's grace putting your life in proper order under his rule. God's peace will guard/garrison/fortify your heart & mind. Jesus Christ, Paul says, will deploy the armies of grace to camp in a fortress around your heart/mind to protect them against the onslaught of anxiety – worry - fear – agitation – distress. *Strengthen the fellowship...Seek God's peace...*

Set your minds on God's good gifts...**"Now,** dear brothers & sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, & honourable, & right, & pure, & lovely, & admirable. Think about things that are excellent & worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned & received from me—everything you heard from me & saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you."

When you have a "quieter" moment & are able to think about life, what do you think? *When your mind is free to think, what do you think? Daydreams? Private chats?* If all you focus on is that the PM's a goose & Russia's about to nuke Ukraine & Iran's about to nuke Israel & China's about to nuke us...If your private thoughts are that the pagan world is storming the gates of your kids' lives & the church is about to sink because no

one believes anything any more except climate change...old injury insult...What are your quiet moments going to feel like? If in your quiet moment you turn on MAFS, RHWoS, or Gogglebox...Watching awful people on TV does not make you better. Set your minds on God's good gifts...figure out a way to share them w/ someone else. It's not hard... We know what God's good gifts look like in this world...focus on those & don't be distracted by the rubbish the rest of the world thinks is awesome/tangled up in. If all else fails, Paul says, do what I do, watch me, imitate me. Find people who seem to be close to Jesus & imitate them. They're going to tell you they're not perfect. Absolutely...perfection is what Jesus does to us in heaven. Here we aim for true, honourable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent & worthy of praise. Stand there.

Contentment, to many in our world, is circumstantial/conditional. Paul gives a different **answer**: *I have learned how to be content with whatever I have.* How is that possible? True joy & genuine contentment are not built upon circumstance but on the life/death/rez/rule of Jesus as those guide & guard me everywhere I am every day I'm alive. True joy & genuine contentment flourish among us as we Strengthen the fellowship, Seek God's peace & Set our minds on God's good gifts... figure out a way to share them w/ someone **else**.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, & thank him for all he has done

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.

His peace will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

True joy & contentment are only found in a relationship with Jesus. As David wrote 100s of years **earlier**... *The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.*

True contentment & genuine joy are ours...in every circumstance or condition because Jesus is our Shepherd & we are his forever.

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

What are some of God's good gifts, you will "fix your thoughts on" this week to increase your contentment?

With whom will you share your contented joy?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus fill us with your presence so there's no room for anxiety worry fear or distress. By your Spirit strengthen the fellowship we enjoy as your church, lead us more deeply into the Father's peace, & anchor our minds on your good gifts...Let the world find in us credible & inviting witnesses to your great love & deep joy...We pray in your Name... Amen