

Sermon on **Philippians 4:10-18** – St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church  
8.4.19 –8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - Pastor Nate Scharf

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I am thankful to be here at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Ulm. God has called me through his church, you, to serve as your Pastor. It is a high privilege. I don't just serve you. I serve among you as you also have been equipped to serve. I am served by you as you support my needs and the physical, spiritual, emotional needs of all those you've called to serve you. For all this I am thankful, and it causes me to *rejoice in the Lord* for you and for his wisdom in how he set up the family of believers to fellowship in this giving and receiving. The apostle Paul gets to the heart of our relationship in this work as the body of Christ and our reason to rejoice and strive together.

**Saved Stewards Support, Share and Serve.**

When Jesus called his enemy, Paul, to follow and serve him, he sent Ananias, a believer to speak to him, *"Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* Paul learned about God's grace and it changed him and everything.

On his second mission journey, Paul went to Philippi. There the Lord turned hearts through the Gospel message. Persecution also came. (The whole account is in Acts 16 and beautifully displayed in movie version in our synod's outreach video, "To the ends of the earth." These are complimentary. Grab one and watch it.) The Philippians never forgot Paul, how he shared with them our Savior Jesus. They never forgot the work he was doing in sharing the Gospel all over the world despite persecution. The Philippians were not a rich congregation monetarily and suffered no end of hardship and persecution themselves, but they **supported** Paul. When Paul was imprisoned and awaiting trial in Rome, they sent a gift and delegation led by Epaphroditus to Rome to take care of him and his needs.

Paul's response: *"I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were 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."*

God taught Paul something difficult: Contentment. No matter the situation, Paul was ok, and more than ok. Paul did not stress when the church had problems. Paul did not despair when there was no money in his wallet. Paul did not become arrogant and forget the Lord when his wallet was full, and all was going well. Paul went about his work with great effort and joy because he didn't look at himself or the ever-changing outward situation. The secret to contentment is this – Jesus.

Paul said, *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* Our hearts want to see this passage as our ticket to get anything and everything our hearts desire and claim a biblical mandate to go after it. That does not seem to be the context here, does it as Paul writes from jail to a poor congregation under persecution bearing heavy crosses? I had a poster in my bedroom growing up that had this passage on it. The background was a basketball player dunking a basketball high above the rim over the top of their opponent. I was sure as I grew up and ate my Wheaties that I would be able to dunk. I tried and tried, even trained with my friend's jump trainer shoes to help me, and only then when they came out with the adjustable hoop where you could bring it down to 6 feet high, was I able to dunk. But I never could dunk a basketball on an actual hoop. In truth, more often we are the opponent being dunked on in that poster. Paul teaches us that we can bear up under the bad times and not be taken away in the good times and stay focused and have all we need no matter the situation because of the one who strengthens us – Our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus makes us able and gives us the strength to **support and share**.

*"Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need."* "Dear Aunt Helen, thank you for the gift of a beach towel. I will use it at the beach to keep dry and

sunbathe. It is neat. Thank you again. Love, Nate.” We often focus on the gift in our thank yous. Paul focuses on what this says about the givers. The Gospel had taken root in their hearts and they realized the importance of supporting and sharing in this work. Paul often refused gifts and support at times in his ministry to show that the Gospel is indeed free! Jesus paid the ultimate price for us. Our offerings don’t pay God back, nor do they barter with God for more stuff. But Paul could not refuse this mature and godly gift from the Philippians. This gift said something about their faith. They knew grace and they wanted to **share**.

What do your gifts say about you? I don’t know what each of you give to the Lord in the offering plate or by direct deposit. I know some general stats about our congregation – a good number give regularly and generously. A good number give nothing or almost nothing. I know my own heart. It’s not always easy to give a regular offering with a joyful and thankful heart, a conscientious and consistent decision to say thank you for the Lord’s work for me and in my support of the Lord’s work here and abroad. Why is it so hard? It’s because one of our greatest idols is greed. My sinful heart tries to prioritize everything else in pursuit of fulfillment, pleasure or “just a little more” over the joy of giving to the Lord with a thankful heart. It’s because one of our greatest sins is unbelief in God’s promises that he can provide for us consistently and regularly.

God gave manna 6 days a week, a double portion on Friday, for 40 years in the wilderness. And then he led his people into the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey. The manna stopped because God would use the land to produce far more than they needed. The LORD pleaded with them that in all this abundance, “Don’t forget me.” And what did they do? Other things: business, pleasure, convenience trumped his house, their offerings to him, and their hearts turned to the gifts rather than the giver. I have been guilty of not being content with what God has given or when he has given it. Thank offerings to God have not always been so thankful but grudging or put off in lieu of expenses or to treat myself. Greed and unbelief in God’s promises attack each of us.

*“Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”* Now that just scares me a bit. God knows my heart and the struggle with contentment that I have. I see my own sin, and I only understand the half of it, but he must be disgusted with me. But Paul says these gifts to him from Philippi and even ours are noted with a smile and looked upon as *fragrant offerings, acceptable sacrifices* like in the OT temple as the barbecue smell went up to heaven, in fact our gifts to him are *pleasing* to him. Why? How?

*“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”* The one who provides for us each day in rich abundance in every way – physical, spiritual, emotionally, is the one who will meet all our needs as we bring our gifts to him. He is not going to let us down or set us up for failure. Why? Because *of the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*. We are in Christ Jesus! Our sins of greed and unbelief are washed away and blotted out in the blood of our Savior Jesus. God doesn’t see them anymore because of his Son.

One of my associates will come into my office every few months to tell me he lost some document on his computer and it is gone forever. Whatever the platform he was typing on, there didn’t seem to be autosave and delete was hit and the file lost never to be recovered. He did it by accident. God does this intentionally. His forgiveness for our sin is full, permanent and free. He hit delete on the record of our sin. No cloud. No autosave. No undo. No screenshot. Jesus said, *“It is finished.”* “My God” has met our greatest need in forgiving us and freeing us and he will continue to provide for us so that we can be generous at all times in this fellowship of giving and receiving as we strive to work together to share this Gospel message. His blood covers even our imperfect works and God is pleased, and even keeps account of our good gifts to him. He will meet our needs. He has promised and always keeps his promises. So we can **serve** Him with confidence!

From the first day Paul knew God’s grace to him in Christ, he never stopped working and spending himself to share his Savior. From the first day the Philippians knew God’s grace to them in Christ Jesus, they never stopped **servicing** and praying and working for the gospel to go out to the rest of the world. The same goes for us. Through his Word and Sacrament God will grow us to do better and better like the Philippians, trusting in his providing, thankful for all he’s given, excited as **Saved Stewards to Support, Share and Serve!** *“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*