

PENTECOST 19 YEAR A  
ISAIAH 25:1-9  
PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9  
MATTHEW 22:1-14  
OCTOBER 14, 15, 2017

Most of us have times and situations that might keep us from praising God. Those times also make it more difficult for us to remember to pray. Christians often think that everything will be smooth sailing once they have become a Christian but then it seems the opposite is true. We experience hardship and struggles when others seem to be doing just fine. Families that face difficult situations are to remain as one family. Family members might have differing ideas about how problems might be handled but the family must remain one family moving in one direction.

The beginning of our reading from Philippians tells of a church that might be struggling. Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to stay firm in faith and continue walking with the Lord. Euodia and Syntyche were leaders of the church but there may have been some division between the two. When there is division among the church leadership there is often a divided church. Paul instructs the church to be in the same mind having the same spirit working through them. They are to work together with Paul in order to proclaim and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are also to cooperate with each other and to support the women sent to minister to them and to the church.

Many among us are struggling to continue in discipleship. We might wonder about our Christian walk. Some are reconsidering their commitment to walk the way of Christ and finding it difficult to take up their cross daily and follow Jesus. There may be challenges in counting the cost of loving God and neighbor. What does Paul say?

**Philippians 4:4, 5 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.**

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while imprisoned in Rome. His circumstances were not so good and he was under house arrest. Even though Paul was a prisoner he writes about rejoicing in all circumstances and trusting God in every situation of life. We are invited and encouraged to rejoice no matter where we are or what we are facing. We rejoice in the Lord because we can remember the Lord's presence with us. Hebrews 3 also teaches that we are to remain in faith fixing our thoughts and our sights on Jesus. Looking at the Lord allows us to truly rejoice and to give thanks for all things and at all times. We have the promise from God that the Lord is good and God's love endures forever.

The Philippian Christians were to rejoice in the blessings of the Lord remembering that God has loved them and has been with them. They were to also be gentle with others. They were to be gentle because the Lord was gentle. They were to be imitators of Jesus Christ and follow in faith. Paul is recalling the teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus declaring that the Lord is near. The kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came bringing the kingdom. The early disciples and those that come later are to model the Lord's gentleness and his faithfulness. They and we are to hold onto the example and the teaching of Jesus as we experience salvation and life.

The Lord being near is not so much about a time line as it is about God being present among us as we gather and as we go about our daily challenges. Paul believed and many of the early Christians believed that Jesus would return in their lifetime. That did not happen but Paul's teaching in these verses is not about the Lord's return but about God being present with us in our trials and in our struggles. If God is near we have every reason to rejoice in the Lord. If the Lord was gentle throughout his life we also can be gentle with those that would cause hardship for us because of the gospel.

In our own time many expect Jesus to return at any moment. We hear and see the natural disasters and those created with human hands and believe that Jesus must be coming soon. As Jesus said in his teaching, “no one knows the day and the hour of our Lord’s return.” The truth is that Jesus is here among us and walking with us. The Holy Spirit moves in this place and moves among us. We are the church in this place and we do the work of the Lord from here. You and I are gentle and kind as we care for God’s people. We rejoice knowing that the Lord is hear with us.

**Philippians 4:6, 7      Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Paul teaches us to pray always. He also tells us to pray without ceasing. Paul is not saying that they should walk around with hands folded and heads down but that they should always be in an attitude of prayer. When my first wife was hospitalized in Rochester following surgery I often went outside to walk around and reflect. Part of that time was spent reflecting and thinking of the things going on in our lives. Other times I was in prayer. My prayers were for healing but also for guidance and strength as Karmen and I walked through this together. One afternoon I was walking around downtown Rochester praying. This time my head was down even if my hands were not folded. As I walked and prayed I did not see the light pole in front of me. The next thing I was doing was looking around to see who was watching as I walked into the pole.

Having an attitude of prayer means we are thankful that the Lord hears our prayers and ministers to us. The attitude of prayer says that we are open to the Lord’s teaching and the Lord’s direction. We are open to the spirit that instructs us and guides us. Paul says that we pray with thanksgiving but to also let our requests be made known to God. God wants to hear from us. God wants us to go to the Lord in prayer. Being in a relationship with God means there are conversations and there is companionship.

Paul says to not worry or be anxious about anything but pray about everything. Worry and prayer are opposites. When we are anxious about things and worry about things we often do not think to pray. In our worry and anxiety we forget the promise of God to always be near to us. We get caught up in what might happen and we forget what has already happened. We forget that Jesus has already come and is with us even in our struggles. My worry cannot change the results of the medical report. My worry cannot make me do better on a test at school. Worry cannot make me a better pastor or have better relationships with those around me. Worry and anxiety rob us from precious time we have to make good things happen. We are denied the chance to come closer to God who cares for us. It steals our ability to pray and to be in faith.

Continuing in prayer and in faith will help us have the peace that passes all understanding. God will help us keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. We will have the Lord's direction. We will share in God's love. We will know the gentleness of our Lord Jesus.

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN**