

Peace in a World of Anxiety

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-9

**Baxter T. Exum (#1543)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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*****COVID-19 LIVESTREAM*****

It is good to be with you this morning! As most of you can see, we have the church's contact information on the screen again today, and if you have anything we need to be praying about, any updates to our prayer concerns, we would invite you to get in touch. And again, if you need supplies for taking the Lord's Supper, if you are in need of food, if there is some way we can serve you, we hope you will get in touch. For those of you joining us on the phone this morning, the church number is 608-224-0274, and we can receive both calls and texts at this number.

We're also putting a summary of God's plan of salvation on the screen as well. More accurately, this is a summary of OUR part of it. God has made all of this possible by sending his Son to this earth to live a perfect life and to be the one and only atonement for our sins. We respond by hearing and understanding the good news. And then we obey it. We turn away from sin (we repent), we publicly confess our belief in Jesus as being the Son of God, and then we obey the Lord's command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. At that point, we are born into God's family, and the Christian life begins. As most of you can see, I'm including two pictures this week, of two young women who were baptized within the past week or so at the Mt. Juliet congregation down in Tennessee. We need some good news this morning, and this is it. Even with everything that's going on in the world right now, good things are happening. If you are at the point where you are ready to do what these two young women have done, please give me a call. Or if you'd like to study and learn more, please give me a call.

This morning, I'd like for us to study a passage from the book of Philippians. It is consistently given as a favorite passage by several of our members. We've looked at pieces of it here and there through the years, but today we'll be looking at the bigger picture. And speaking of pictures, we are using some original artwork this morning! This is by one of our own! This comes from Carly. Our families were eating together down at Luke's Diner in McFarland after worship a few months ago, and Carly had her sketchbook with her. She shared this, and I asked if I could get a picture of it. She was good with that, I checked in again this week to see if it was okay to use this today, and she agreed. So, we are thankful to Carly for the peaceful scene this morning.

I was looking for a peaceful scene, because the passage we'll be looking at today is Philippians 4:1-9, and we'll be looking at some inspired advice from the apostle Paul concerning how to be at PEACE even as we live in a world of ANXIETY. For the purpose of our study today, when we think about anxiety, Paul uses a word referring to worry. He uses a word referring to the cares of this world, the idea of being constantly overwhelmed with the things that are happening around us. Most of us understand this. Especially in times like these, it is very easy to let our minds be overwhelmed with the almost endless possibilities of everything that might go wrong. We worry. And this expresses itself in many ways. Perhaps we have a hard time sleeping at night. Maybe we distract ourselves by eating. Maybe it's just a constant feeling of restlessness or unease. Maybe we just always feel as if some terrible thing is about to happen. There are so many ways this anxiousness might express itself, and most of us have experienced at least some level of anxiety at some point or another for various reasons.

And right now, it seems we might have a few more reasons to be anxious! This morning, then, I want us to look at several verses in the last chapter of Philippians. Of all people, the apostle Paul had a reason to be anxious! He writes Philippians, of course, as he is under house arrest in the city of Rome. He writes during that two-year period as he's in his own rented apartment, chained to a Roman soldier, described for us in the last few verses of the book of Acts. The church in Philippi is facing some issues of their own, having faced persecution from the very beginning. So, as Paul wraps up one of the most positive and encouraging letters in the New Testament, he has these seemingly random thoughts thrown in together here at the end, and for the purpose of our study today, I'm putting them under the heading of "living in peace in a world of anxiety." But I want us to notice: Paul doesn't just tell them not to be anxious! I'm reminded of the meme we've probably seen, "Never in the history of calming down has anyone ever calmed down by being told to calm down." We understand this! And the same goes for anxiety. Never in the history of being worried has anyone ever stopped being worried by being told not to worry! Now, the Bible does tell us not to worry, but along with the command, we also have some encouragement, we are given some tools. And that is what we find here.

So, let's please look together at Paul's inspired advice for living at peace in a world of anxiety. We're looking at Philippians 4:1-9,

¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. ³ Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

We don't have the time to look at every word and phrase in this passage, but I would like to hit some of the highlights around this theme of living in peace.

I. And I want us to start in verses 1-3 as the apostle Paul tells us to **RESOLVE CONFLICT**.

And this is the part of this we looked at in sermon form back in July of 2016. So, we won't spend too much time on this, but I include it here, because I think most of us realize that interpersonal conflict has a way of adding to our anxiety. Especially in a time like this, having a problem with somebody is just awful – especially if we're talking about a fellow Christian. I would emphasize that the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche does not appear to be doctrinal. It's not that one of them was denying the necessity of baptism or something. Paul addresses false teaching in Chapter 3. If one or both of these women had been promoting something false, I believe Paul would have said so. But instead, he basically tells them to get along with each other. So, this seems to be something in the realm of opinion. They were fighting over something stupid. So here, Paul apparently hears about this beef between two Christian sisters, and he calls them out on it, in Scripture! Before we move on, I just want us to imagine this. Paul sends this letter to Philippi from Rome. The messenger shows up, Lydia is there with her family, the jailer is there with his family, others have obeyed the gospel since then, elders and deacons have been appointed, and maybe one of the elders reads this letter publicly, ***“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,”*** and so on. And then suddenly, the one who is reading gets to this point and reads it out loud, ***“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.”*** Can we even imagine how embarrassing that must have been? Can we imagine inserting the names of two women from our congregation? And here we are, nearly 2000 years later, and we are still reading about this disagreement between these two women. And the encouragement is: Work it out! ***“Live in harmony in the Lord.”*** And what applies to them certainly applies to us. When we have a disagreement with a fellow Christian, we need to work it out, because we know (some of us by experience) that unresolved personal conflict adds to anxiety.

How important is this? It's so important that in Matthew 5, Jesus actually gives this as an excuse to be late to worship. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says, ***“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”*** Years ago, I noticed two Christian sisters not partaking of the Lord's Supper. I don't usually notice who is and isn't partaking, but this caught my eye for some reason, so I pulled them aside and asked about it. Basically, they had a problem with another Christian, and they were using what Jesus said in Matthew 5 to justify not partaking of the Lord's Supper. I had to explain, though, that the solution is not to stop worshiping, the solution is to work it out, and then worship! The goal is ***“living in harmony in the Lord,”*** as Paul indicates here. So, first of all, if we have an issue with somebody or if we know somebody has an issue with us, both Paul and the Lord would encourage us work it out.

II. Secondly, in terms of living at peace in a world of anxiety, let's notice how Paul gives the command (in verse 4) to **REJOICE ALWAYS, AND AGAIN I SAY REJOICE**.

I know it's easy for us to hear the word ***“rejoice”*** and to think of being happy, but in the NASB at least, this particular word is never translated as ***“happiness.”*** ***“Glad,”*** yes, but never ***“happy.”*** And there does seem to be at least some slight difference. As I see it, ***“happiness”*** is more of a feeling we get because of something. In the Beatitudes, Jesus uses a word that is sometimes translated as ***“happy.”*** ***“Blessed”*** or ***“happy”*** are those who do this or that. ***“Happiness”*** is more of a feeling. ***“Rejoicing,”*** though, is the kind of gladness that can be commanded in spite of circumstances, in spite of our feelings. Again, remember what Paul is going through as

he writes these words: He is imprisoned in Rome. He's under house arrest. He is chained to a Roman soldier. But even in those circumstances, Paul could ***"rejoice,"*** and he could tell others to ***"rejoice."***

So, we think about what we are going through right now, and don't we also have some reasons to rejoice? These are not happy times, but in spite of what is going on right now, aren't we still able to rejoice? Our sins are forgiven. We have a Christian family. We have the word of God. We have food, and clothing, and shelter. Most of us are still employed and able to provide not only for our own families, but for others as well. This might not make us "happy," in the sense that we're laughing and smiling, but it's a sense of peace, it's a sense of calm, it's a sense of gladness. It's the same spirit of rejoicing that allowed Paul and Silas to pray and to sing songs of praise to God at midnight in prison in Philippi back in Acts 16. Their joy was not dependent on any outward circumstances, but they were at peace. And the same is true for us today. If God commands it, this is something we can do. And Paul repeats it, ***"Rejoice, and again I say rejoice."***

III. The third concept here comes in verse 5 as Paul says, *"Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Or, as I've put it on the screen, we are to PRACTICE GENTLENESS.*

This idea of a ***"gentle spirit"*** is hard to translate. Other translations might refer to ***"moderation,"*** or ***"forbearance,"*** ***"mildness,"*** or maybe ***"fair-mindedness"*** or ***"leniency,"*** or even ***"yielding."*** One author refers to the idea of "inner calmness." And we know how important this is. When the world around us seems to be out of control, it's especially important for us to stay in control, to be calm in the face of panic. I remember my grandmother talking about being "calm, cool, and collected." In the ancient world, the term was used to describe a good teacher dealing with a difficult student. The word was used to describe the behavior of parents toward their children. Someone has suggested the idea of "sweet reasonableness." One author referred to the "shocking graciousness of untamed humility." Another author referred to this as being "an intense combination of humility, graciousness, selflessness, and mission." Following the example of Jesus, it's the Christian's response to unfairness, hatred, and persecution. We think of Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:21-23, where he said, ***"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."***

We look around us in the current crisis: As some people scream one thing, and other people scream something else, we as God's people are not to be a part of this. We are not to get caught up in the culture of rage. This gentleness is the ability to quietly pull to the side without retaliating when another driver exhibits road rage toward us. I think about the combination of humility and mission I referred to earlier. My mission is to get home, and beating a fellow driver to death or getting involved in a rolling gun battle is outside that mission; therefore, I will let this slide. It's not a sign of weakness on our part, but it's a sign of self-control, a sign of maturity, a calm and forbearing spirit under stress. This quality is needed not only on the Beltline, but at home as well. We don't always need to react to everything. It's the idea of holding back, even if we have the power or the right to lash out. And notice: Paul says that our gentle spirit is ***"...to be known to all people."*** In other words, this isn't just a quality we experience on the inside, but when things happen around us, people need to see our reaction and take notice. As God's people, we are to be unusual in the way we react to things. When they expect us to be angry, we respond with grace. When they expect us to lose control, we answer with calm.

And the reason Paul gives here is, ***“For the Lord is near.”*** I don’t know if this is distance-near or he-might-come-back-at-any-moment-near, but either way, we are calm in the face of panic, because the Lord is with us and he is in control.

IV. As we continue moving through this passage, notice (in verses 6-7) how Paul tells us to REPLACE ANXIETY WITH PRAYER.

“Be anxious for nothing,” Paul says, ***“but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*** First of all, notice how Paul says, ***“Be anxious for nothing.”*** It’s tempting for us to modify that a bit, “Be anxious for nothing, except when your kids are out after midnight and they’re not answering their phone. Then you can worry.” We might be tempted to say, “Be anxious for nothing, except when you are facing a pandemic. Then you can worry.” And yet, Paul doesn’t say that, does he? No, he says, ***“Be anxious for nothing.”***

But he doesn’t leave it there. Instead, he tells us to replace anxiety with prayer. ***“Prayer”*** refers to the idea of approaching God with reverence. A ***“supplication”*** is a request; we are asking something. And then he refers to ***“thanksgiving.”*** We acknowledge what God has done for us. And with all three of these terms, we come to God ***“in everything,”*** in every circumstance. We come to God, not just with the big concerns, but we come to him with ***“everything,”*** the big trouble and the little trouble, the big worries and the small ones, the kid worries and the pandemic worries. There’s no concern too big for God to handle and no concern so small that he does not care. In everything, instead of being anxious, we take our concerns to God in prayer. We worship, we ask, and then we thank him for what he’s done for us. In the context of anxiety, we pray about whatever it is we might be tempted to worry about. We don’t have to keep everything all hidden away inside, we don’t need to fix every potential problem, but we do take those concerns to God in prayer. As I’ve mentioned before, one thing I’ve done that has helped is to set an alarm. Most of us have phones with an alarm feature. I have one alarm set to “plank” every morning at 6:30. If I can set an alarm to exercise, I can also set an alarm for prayer.

And when we do pray, Paul says that, ***“...the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** When we replace anxiety with prayer, when we take our concerns to God, his peace will guard our hearts and minds. He might not fix our problem or take us out of the trouble, but he will protect our hearts. He will bring us through it. What’s encouraging to me here is: God is concerned about our mental health. He knows our tendency to worry. And so he invites us to take those concerns to him in prayer, and when we do, he has promised to guard our hearts and minds. By sharing the burden with God, the load is so much lighter. So, we do what we can to replace anxiety with prayer.

V. As we come to the end of this passage, let’s notice one last idea as Paul encourages the Christians in Philippi to THINK ON GOOD THINGS AND DO THEM.

Most of us understand that we pretty much are what we think. We are constantly thinking. This is how we get things done. We have an idea, we mull it over for a while, we anticipate possible outcomes, we adjust, and then we do. What Paul addresses in the first part here is the thinking part, ***“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”*** Most of us have some level of control concerning what we think about. We filter, or at least we should! Not all thoughts are good thoughts. So, we weed those out. Some thoughts are unreasonable, so we move on to something else, because we know that what we do starts in the mind. We think of what Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, ***“For out of the heart come***

evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.” It’s important, then, to think about good things, and in this passage, the apostle Paul gives a list. He gives some examples. We don’t have time to look at each one of these, but I would summarize: These are good things!

And so, instead of constantly thinking of what you don’t like about a spouse, instead of constantly thinking about some negative quality, make a list of the good things, and thank God for those. Instead of constantly thinking about the ways we might fall short as a congregation, let’s make a list of the things we appreciate about the Four Lakes congregation, and let’s be thanking God for those things. The same thing goes for living in Madison. The same thing goes for the jobs we might have. The same thing goes for the house we’re in, or the car we drive, or any number of things. We don’t ignore ways we might improve, but we ***“dwell on”*** the good. We dwell on the true, the honorable, the right, the pure, the lovely, the things of good repute, the excellent, and the praiseworthy.

But we don’t leave it there, do we? We take these things, and we put them into ***“practice.”*** We think, and then we do. As James says, ***“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”*** We are to both think and do. And when we do, Paul promises that ***“...the God of peace will be with you.”***

Conclusion:

There is so much we have NOT had the time to study this morning, but we have done something of an overview. We live in a world of anxiety. There is so much we might be worried about, especially now. Paul, though, gives some inspired advice: Work through conflict, rejoice in the Lord, practice gentleness, replace anxiety with prayer, and then think on and do whatever is good.

Again, if we can help in some way, if we can pray with you about something, or if you would like to study the scriptures, if you think you might be ready to obey the gospel, we hope you will get in touch. Give me a call or send a text to 608-224-0274. Send me an email. Or, get in touch with any of the shepherds of the congregation. Our contact information is on the website and also on the bulletin each week.

As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We praise you as the compassionate God who knows our thoughts. You know our concerns and our worries, but we are thankful for the peace that you continue to bring into our lives. And in this time of chaos and uncertainty in the world, we praise you for revealing yourself to us in your word. In spite of the chaos around us, we are thankful this morning for Jesus, we are thankful for his perfect example, and we are especially thankful for his indescribable gift, his death on the cross for us.

Today, we are thankful for answered prayers. We are thankful for those who are serving you by serving others. We continue to be thankful for those who work in healthcare, as they are away from their families, as they continue to put themselves at risk to heal and to save. Bless those who keep our medical facilities up and running. Bless those who keep us supplied with an abundance of good food. We are thankful for our daily bread. We pray that as your people we

might come in contact with those in need, and we pray that you would allow us to meet those needs in your name, as we have the ability.

We continue to pray for our senior saints, and today we also pray for the children of the congregation. We pray that all of us might be willing to trust you with our concerns.

Thank you, Father, for making us a part of your family. Be with us as we partake of the memorial supper today. We look forward to the time when we can be together.

We come to you in the name of your Son, Jesus. Lord, come quickly. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com