

“All”

Philippians 4: 10 – 20

Makemie Presbyterian Church

January 25, 2009

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup>You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This ends our reading.

Now I've told you all before how much I love going to church. Ever since I was a little girl, just never knowing who would show up & what would happen when we were all together. We just never known what will happen, it can be unexpected.

One Sunday morning, I was at First Presbyterian in St Petersburg Florida to do a short presentation for Beth-el Mission & the migrant community, the choir was singing & I was sitting up front with the ministers waiting to give my minute for mission & I saw a guy come in to the middle aisle. He stands there at the back & he starts looking around & I thought, "okay" he's looking for someone; he's late for church & he's looking to sit with someone. So I watched him for a moment. Then he starts ambling down the aisle, casual. He had one of those haircuts that look like you stuck-your-finger-in-a-light socket. Every row he goes by he gets the attention of everybody.

"What's he looking for?" "What's he up to?"

I thought one of the ushers would say, "Can I help you?"

But the ushers were just looking at him too. They didn't do anything. So I thought, "well one of the ministers will do something & the ministers were all sitting with their hands shading their eyes. So he comes to the front. Is just standing there, right in front of where I'm sitting looking up at the choir. By this time the choir's cross-eyed; one eye looking at him & one looking at the director. My curiosity is getting the better of me. I'm watching him, he has on casual clothes, flip flops, just standing there smiling the biggest smile; taking it all in

like there is no tomorrow. A church full of people & here he stands. I thought “well heck, I’ll do something. I’m a guest. I’ll take a chance.” The choir’s still singing. And I said, “Good morning. Can I help you?” I didn’t know what to say. So I said, “What’s your name?” trying to get the conversation going. He said, “Jesus.” Ut oh, out of my depth. I looked back at where I had been safely sitting & thought, why in the name of God did I come down here?”

Now I had heard of people who thought that they are Jesus. I don’t know. I was taken aback. I never met anyone before or since who thought they were Jesus. So I said, “Nice to meet you Jesus.”

I didn’t know what to do. I said again, “Can I help you?”

He said, “No, no. I’m just checking things out down here.”

The choir’s still singing, it’s me & this guy in front of the whole church having this conversation, so I said, “Um, what do you think?”

And he said, “It looks pretty good.” He said, “You’re doing a good job, just carry on.”

I said, “Would you like to be seated? I’m doing the minute for mission.”

And he said, “No, I’ve got to be moving on.”

So I flew back up the steps & sat down. The ministers still not looking up and he gets to the back & stops & stands there for a second & comes back down the aisle & motions for me. Well what are you going to do? I went back down the steps & he leans into to

me & says; “I just want you to know there’s going to be a hard freeze in citrus country this year.”

I said, “Oh.”

He said, “Yes.”

I walk back up, he walks back down the aisle. He left.

Guess what, it was 1989 when central Florida was hit with such a hard freeze it wiped out most of the citrus industry. You never know who’s going to be at church. It’s a privilege to worship with you in this beautiful sanctuary.

You know contentment is a hard thing to find nowadays. I don’t know about you but I find about everywhere I go people don’t seem content. It’s a rare bird that says, “I’m content.” It’s the economy, it’s the neighbors, it’s the car just bought that’s not quite right, it’s the way they said this, I don’t like the way they do that; people just stirred up all the time. Just are not content.

So as Ted read Paul’s letter, our text for this morning, it’s surprising to hear, two times, the expression, “I have learned to be content.” “I have learned” that’s a technical term in the original language that means “I have been to school.” “I have been to school & what did I learn? I learned to be content.” And Paul uses the word “secret.” “I learned the secret.” Now secret usually means, nobody knows” (except here in Snow Hill.) But here secret means, “that which is hidden in the past that has now been revealed in the present.” So Paul is saying, “I have been to school & learned & the mystery has been revealed.” Or as it reads in our text, “I have learned the secret of contentment.” In these words Ted just read, Paul wraps up his

beautiful letter to the church at Philippi and he talks about that secret of contentment.

Now I'll pull it together the best I can. Paul gives several parallels, he sets up one case, rich or poor, he sets up well fed or hungry. Paul seems to think there are some circumstances, where he doesn't ask for himself but whatever the circumstances of his life, I have learned the secret of contentment. And it's in these verses.

And Paul describes his gratitude to God & to the Philippians for their gifts. But far more than the gift itself were the love & concern the Philippians showed toward Paul – a love & concern that lead them to help him. As so often – it's the thought that counts. What matters is that he has been remembered with affection & concern. Do we always remember to show appreciation for what others do for us? Do we remember to help those, like Paul, who are going through a rough patch & need our prayers & concerns? The secret of contentment seems to be predicated on a heart of generosity because in verses 14 through 18 Paul talks about the church being very generous toward him. Paul was a wayfarer, he was here & he was there & so he had churches that looked after him & the church at Philippi was dear to his heart. Paul loved that church & they loved him & they provided for his needs. Paul writes, "You have amply supplied me & what you have done is a fragrance going up to God." The heart of contentment begins with a generous heart. Paul understood that it's a wonderful gift to be generous & he said, "Generosity is like a fragrant offering going up to God." And generosity can be expressed in many ways; in good deeds, in kind deeds; expressed in financial ways. The heart that overflows with generosity is learning the secret of

contentment; because if you have a lot or if you don't have anything you can learn how to be content. I've found through these years of answering my call that some of the most generous people are those that have the least. And I've been amazed by this.

Every year when I was at seminary I would come back to Florida for the Committee on Ministry's annual review of my grades, my activities & my ongoing statement of faith. While I was back in the Tampa Bay area I would go down to Beth-el in Wimauma to Sunday afternoon service with the migrant communities. The first year I was blow away when Rev. Ramiro Ros had a collection taken for me to help with my studies. I received a sack of coins & a few dollar bills, that totaled almost \$100. I was overwhelmed.

After service Carmen Rodriguez called me over to her. Carmen's house was tiny but in some places the cracks in the walls were so big you could see the outside from the inside. She didn't have much at all. She had something in her hand & she put it in my hand.

I said, "Carmen, what is that?"

And she said, "It's for you."

And I said, "What do you mean?"

She said, "It's a present."

And I opened up my hand & it was a \$5 bill.

And I said, "Oh, Carmen, you don't need to..."

And here is what she said & I'll never forget it. "Don't you rob me of the joy of giving."

She was generous with what God had given her, a lesson in generosity. So to be content I begin with a generous heart. Paul said,

“My God will fully satisfy all your needs.” In the original language it means to “fill up to the full.” When we look at our lives today & the challenges we face with our children & our grandchildren & things happening in our lives, how are we going to deal with it? Paul writes, “My God will fill up to the full every need of yours.”

God says, “I will meet all your needs; A-L-L, all your needs according to God’s riches in glory.” Now I have a theological question for you. How rich is God? Well, God owns it all; the Maker of heaven & earth. The God of the universe brings all God’s resources. In other words, God’s saying, “I will draw from my bank to meet your needs.” The power of God’s resources will be used to meet our needs.

Some years ago I was walking down a concourse in Atlanta & I saw a man approaching who had shoulders about this wide & was about this tall (5’9”). And as he got closer I thought, “I’ve seen this man somewhere before & I kept staring at him; you know how you look at someone you think you’ve seen before? As he got closer I realized he was Paul Anderson; some of you may have heard of Paul Anderson. He won the gold medal in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne Australia by lifting 402.5 lbs in the super-heavy weight lifting class & to give you an idea how extraordinary this was, the most anyone had lifted before was the Russian Med-ved-er at 330.5 lbs. Paul Anderson was the “world’s strongest man.” He began a Christian Boy’s Home for troubled youth in Vidalia Georgia that is still going strong today 15 years after his death. Anyway my softball coach at the time, Glenn Miller was a sportswriter for the St. Pete Times & had just finished a series of stories on former Olympic athletes & it was in this article I had seen Paul Anderson’s photo. Here was the strongest man

approaching me & I wanted to meet him. So I said, “Excuse me, sir, are you Paul Anderson?” And he said, “Yes I am.” And I said, “I’m Debra & I have been reading about your accomplishments.” And we had a wonderful conversation. Well I was even more excitable back then & when he started to continue on, I wanted to do something for him so I said, “Mr. Anderson, do you need help carrying your bags?” And he said, “Nah, I think I can handle it?”

But you know sometimes I think we think we need to help God with his bags. And God owns everything & loves us. And so he said, “Be content. I want you to know that I the Maker of the universe, heaven & earth, I know you. I love you. Be content because I’m watching over you. I’ve got you in my hand.”

“My God will fully satisfy all you needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” And verse 13, “I can do all things through Christ Jesus.” It’s personal. We know that the God up there has made God’s self known in the person of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, ascended into heaven & he cares for me, he knows where I am. And he knows what I need, therefore be content. Jesus Christ, that’s the secret Paul is writing about. “My God will fully satisfy all our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Do you remember the old hymn, “Jesus is my all in all?” You remember that?

You are my strength when I am weak,

You are the treasure that I seek,

You are my all in all.

Seeking You as a precious jewel,

Lord to give up I'd be a fool, You are my all in all.

Taking my sin, my cross, my shame,  
Rising again, I bless Your name,  
You are my all in all.

When I fall down, You pick me up,  
When I am dry You fill my cup,  
You are my all in all.

Jesus is more than enough. Do you agree? More than enough.  
Amen.