

On this Thanksgiving Day, we are gathered here together to give thanks to God, to praise him for all that he has done, and then also to gather together with family and eat good food, and to do all these things together all in the honor of the Lord. And we want to draw our attention, especially on this day, to the words of Paul in our Epistle lesson, from Philippians chapter 4. I actually want to back it up a little bit from where we started, to start at verse four in that same chapter. Paul says this. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Those are the words we really want to focus on today and what it means to give thanks on this Thanksgiving Day.

But we might stop and say, "But hold on a second here, Paul. Let's back up a second, because we're not having all that great of a year. 2020 isn't all that great. We've been suffering many things. How can we give thanks in hard times?" This sounds well and good when we're talking about things going easy. But what you do when things aren't going so well?

Just think about all the things we've had to deal with this past year. Dealing with things like the coronavirus, which has caused some to become sick and even a few to die. But above all has caused a great disruption in our society. Everything seems to be tearing apart. We are told to stay apart from one another. We're told to not have families gather together. Everything seems to be turned upside down. How can you give thanks in a situation like that? We've had a particularly divided year politically too, because we had an unusual election. Things just seemed to not go all that well. And people are at each other's throats more than ever. How are we supposed to give thanks in a situation like that?

And maybe worst of all, we're dealing with people who are becoming increasingly suspicious of one another. We don't treat each other as human beings anymore. We treat each other as potential sources of danger, someone who might mess up my life, whether they mean to or not. And so we are always leery of one another. How can we give thanks in a nation which seems to not even be all that nice anymore? Hard times are causing us to wonder what it means to give thanks to the Lord.

But Paul says to us, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Don't be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." But Paul, you weren't listening! You didn't hear a thing that I said! Maybe you don't really understand my situation. Maybe you had an easier time of it. Maybe back in your day things were a lot better and so you didn't have to deal with my particular problems. And for that reason, it was real easy for you to say, "Rejoice." It was real easy for you to say, "Give thanks." If you were in my shoes, on the other hand, maybe you would have a tougher time doing so.

But Christians, Paul had a hard life too. Paul understood what it meant to suffer. Because from the very first time that he became a Christian until the very end of his life, it was all suffering for

the sake of Jesus. Because listen to what he says in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, when he's talking about the things that he is undergoing. He says, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one." Five times Paul was literally whipped for the sake of the Gospel.

"Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked, a day and a night I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers. In toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." Paul suffered much for the sake of the Gospel, even suffering things which, Lord willing, we will never have to suffer. His whole life was one continuous hard time because of what Jesus had called him to do. And even when he wrote Philippians and wrote the words that he gave to us this morning, he was in prison in Rome for the sake of the Gospel, suffering all of these things for Jesus. Paul certainly knew what it means to suffer for the sake of Christ. Paul knew a bad year, because he had many bad years for what he had to endure.

But even in the midst of all of that, Christians, even in the midst of his suffering, Paul could give thanks to God. He could praise him for all that he had done. Even the seemingly small, insignificant things, things that don't seem like all that important, he could give thanks for those too, because he knew they had all come from the gracious and merciful hand of God. And so Paul in our reading gives thanks for the gift which he receives from the Philippians. They had sent him money, after all, to support him while he was in prison. And he says, "I didn't really need it. I don't need the gift. I'm not in any kind of want. But I give thanks that you showed your love for me in sending it. Because God working through you sent me this to support me, even when every other church was not doing so. You showed that love for me and for that I can give thanks." And Paul could also give thanks for their faith which they were showing through what they had given to him. Paul could say, "God is using you to not only build up my faith, but also to build each other up and to build up every church that hears of your good deed. And I can give thanks for that, because God is using you for this purpose."

But above all, Christians, Paul could give thanks even in the very worst circumstances for Christ himself. Christ, who had given himself for Paul, Christ, who had called him out of unbelief, Christ, who had promised him eternal life. And in all of these things, no matter what Paul was facing, he knew the secret of facing plenty and hunger, of abundance and need. He could do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthened him. And so without Jesus, Paul would have nothing at all. He could have everything else in the world, but without Christ, it would mean nothing. But with Jesus, Paul had everything. Even if everything else was to be taken away, Paul still had the promise of eternal life, and that gave him hope in the face of an uncertain future. He could give thanks for what God had done in his Son Jesus Christ, because God does not fail in his mercies.

So Christians, on this Thanksgiving Day, as we gather together to give thanks to God and gather together with our families, let us remember all of God's little mercies. Let us give thanks for the food that we are about to receive. Let us give thanks for the family, both near and far, those who can gather and those who can't. Let us give thanks for our health, if we have it. Let us give thanks for our jobs that allow us to provide for our families. All of God's little mercies that he continues to give to us day by day. But above all, let us give thanks for Jesus, Jesus, who has

given us a living faith, a faith which will blossom and grow into everlasting life where we will be able to praise him forevermore.

So hear again the words of Paul this day, Christians. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

To him be all glory and thanks forever. Amen.