

## **Sermon Pentecost 19 Year A**

### **Philippians 4:1-9**

My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry 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.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

## **Prayer:**

May the Words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, my Lord, and my Redeemer.

## **Sermon**

St. Paul wrote:

... whatever is true, whatever is honorable,  
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is  
pleasing, whatever is commendable,  
if there is any excellence and if there is  
anything worthy of praise, think about those things.

*Given today's angry political chatter,*

*and our blame shifting and finger pointing,*

*We need to remember St. Paul's wise advice:*

*"Let your gentleness be known to everyone."*

St. Paul probably dictated today's Epistle to a secretary –  
called an *amanuensis*—

while he sat in a Roman prison cell,  
awaiting a circus trial, before Emperor Nero.<sup>1</sup>

Paul probably thought that, Nero would probably have him killed.<sup>2</sup>

And that is probably what happened.<sup>3</sup>

St. Paul may have hoped he'd get away <sup>4</sup> with a warning.

That had happened before.

Or, maybe he thought he'd be rescued by an angel.

That had also happened before.

Sitting on a stone bench in a Roman prison,

Paul was a pretty calm guy.

But he wasn't rescued. Paul's work, here, was done.

St. Paul was a very, brave and very faithful man.

If I were facing a Roman circus trial and a horrible execution,

I probably wouldn't be so mellow.

“Everyone wants to go to heaven,

but no one wants to go there *today*.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul wrote his Epistles to people of his own time<sup>6</sup>

about matters that concerned them.

It seems like the human condition doesn't change a lot,

from generation to generation.

Their challenges look a lot like ours.

St. Paul expected Jesus to come back any minute.

So, in response to the troubles of their day, he wrote:

“Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

*The Lord is near.”*

St. Paul had very traditional Roman ideas

about society and home life.<sup>7</sup>

Today, some see him as having old fashioned ideas

about women’s roles in Church.<sup>8</sup>

Maybe so. He did live 2000 years ago!

Some of us might not want St Paul as a neighbor.

Too bossy.

Some might not want him on City Council.

Too argumentative.

But he was calm and faithful and brave.

We’d want him around when the times get tough.

*Philippi was a big deal. They were busy.*

*It would have been in the Evening News a lot.*

In Paul's day, Philippi was a 400-year-old port city  
in the south of Greece, on the Aegean Sea.

They had an active gold mine.

They were rich and they were busy.

Paul liked Philippi. He first came ashore, around 50 AD.

He came back twice, around 56 and 57.

After three visits, he wrote his Epistle, around 62 AD.

*Philippi would have been in the Evening News:*

After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 42 BC,

a General named Mark Antony, and two other guys

won a big battle there, against Caesar's assassins.

*Mark Antony went on to meet a lady named Cleopatra.*

*They became a thing.*

Mark and Cleopatra were busy:

They had three kids.

They ran an empire.

They named a salad after their friend Caesar.

Plus, Mark and Cleo *made a movie together.*

*Some of you may have seen it.*

Philippi was busy. Maybe it was too busy. <sup>9</sup>

Like us today. We all need to mellow out!

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."<sup>10</sup>

So, Paul wrote to the Philippians about

the "peace of God", and the "God of peace". <sup>11</sup>

**But what is "peace"?** <sup>12</sup>

We think of peace as the *absence of conflict*. And it is!

But that's just the beginning of God's kind of "peace". <sup>13</sup>

In his letters, Paul used the Greek word "*eirene*" for "*peace*". <sup>14</sup>

That Greek word for "peace", means "*to join*".

And it's connected to a word which means

*"speaking" or "talking."*

So, "*Peace*", for Paul, *meant people talking together*.<sup>15</sup>

Maybe not in one voice.

But at least talking calmly, by collective agreement.

Peace thrives when *we agree to disagree*. <sup>16</sup>

Peace thrives when we agree to listen courteously,

to someone we don't agree with.

Peace thrives when we agree to disagree for the sake of  
peace and good order, security, safety,  
prosperity, felicity, and harmony.<sup>17</sup>

When St. Paul wrote about God's "peace",  
He wasn't referring to some magical peace.  
Heavenly Peace isn't "pie in the sky".<sup>18</sup>  
It's real if we want it!

Paul wrote that people should peacefully wait  
for Christ's return.<sup>19</sup> *We are still waiting!*  
*But meanwhile we have peace to make right here, in Texas.*<sup>20</sup>

- We make peace by inviting everyone to the Lord's table.  
*All Are Welcome!*
- We make peace by listening.
- We make peace by loving and *servicing both* our neighbors and our enemies.

"... whatever is true, whatever is honorable,  
whatever is just, whatever is pure?  
whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable ..."

Think about those things and keep on doing them.

**--AMEN**

---

<sup>1</sup> His reference to "bishops" and "deacons" as set out in many translations misleadingly leads one to think that the church was well developed by the time the letter was written. This is probably not

---

so, since the Greek words used for “overseer” and “servant,” which he used, were later adopted as titles for organized clergy that did not exist in the 1st century AD.

<sup>2</sup> See, Cor. 1:12-4:20

<sup>3</sup> We don't know precisely what happened to either Peter or Paul. Tradition holds that they were both martyred in Rome in around the year 64. This was after the great fire, and the emperor Nero seemed to have wanted to blame the fire on a variety of groups in Rome such as Jews and Christians. Now what really happened to Peter and Paul, we can never say for sure but by the mid sixties, say between 62 and 64, it does appear that both Peter and Paul have died. About the same time Josephus tells us that James, the brother of Jesus at Jerusalem, has also been killed. All in about the same two or three year period, so by the mid sixties the original first generation of leadership of the Christian movement has passed away and this is going to set the stage for an important shift that will occur within the next few years.

We also shouldn't minimize the level of expectation that was going through their minds at that time because ... with the passing of this first generation, the expectation that all of those coming events must be closer to hand probably was a concern for a lot of people.” Paul and the other apostles thought that Jesus, the anointed, would return any day.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/missions.html>

<sup>4</sup> Cor. 1:19-26

<sup>5</sup> Well... everyone but St. Paul. He seemed to look forward to it. He also Paul wrote, in effect: “I'd rather go to heaven right now, but I will stay if that is what God wants.” See, Philippians 1:23-24

<sup>6</sup> The people of Philippi and Corinth and Rome, etc.

<sup>7</sup> In seminary we talked a lot about that, and I read interesting articles assessing his theology in that light.

<sup>8</sup> Influenced by Roman customs of that time.

<sup>9</sup> Maybe too busy!

<sup>10</sup> See, John 14:27, but note that John was probably written decades after the Epistle of Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. Are the Gospels connected to the St. Paul's Epistles? The Epistles were all written much earlier than the Gospel's; many scholars think that the Gospels were written because Paul, and Peter and James (and many other early leaders) were dying or being martyred. In the beginning Jesus's followers thought he'd come back any day, but when he didn't, and when people started dying off, they figured somebody had to make a record of what had happened. Mark's Gospel was probably the first to be written, sometime around the year 70. Matthew and Luke were composed independent of one another, sometime in the 80s or 90s, kind of inspired by what Mark wrote. The Gospel of John was not directly connected to Mark,

---

Luke or Matthew. John's Gospel is indebted to oral traditions that had already been around for a while; those were in turn influenced by many things including Paul's letters.

<sup>11</sup> "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

Paul positively knew what God had called him to do. Paul knew that he was the Lord's servant; knowing that leaves you with a wonderful feeling. I have had that feeling. It's a wonderful and welcome light, in the darkest times.

<sup>12</sup> And who is the "God of Peace"?

<sup>13</sup> Is that the same peaceful God who sent an angel to kill of the Egyptian's first born? *I don't know.* When I get to heaven, I am going to ask God, because that whole killing Egyptian babies thing seems harsh! "Hi, I know that you are God and everything, and I am not, but what was up with that deal in Egypt?" Is that what peace is all about?

I don't think that God will mind me asking. Our God is patient. She expects us to think. She expects us to have opinions and questions. Why else give us a frontal lobe?

<sup>14</sup> εἰρήνη

<sup>15</sup> Notably, "Peace" means many things to many people.

<sup>16</sup> In the olden days we would call that kind of peace "harmony, or concord."

<sup>17</sup> The kind of peace and Good Order which keeps us safe and prosperous.

<sup>18</sup> In fact, hardly anybody talked about our idea of "heaven" back then. Many faithful Jews didn't believe in any sort of afterlife. Others believed in a wispy, fuzzy ghostly forever. Most were just trying to survive in the real world.

<sup>19</sup> ... and the transformation of all things. See, Romans 8:6

<sup>20</sup> We won't find God's peace when we wave a bigger stick than the next guy, or yell louder or file more court cases.