

Good morning church.

It is good to be with you this morning – here and online! I hope that everyone has enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday – it’s exciting that we now turn our attention to advent and Christmas.

I am continuing a series in Philippians that I began in March of 2020. Today we look at Chapter 4:1-9.

Open your bibles and turn there please, Philippians 4:1-9 and let’s read His word together. 1Timothy4:13 ... says...

¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Please follow along. As Lana Belz reads the text for today.

Please join me in reading the word of God.

Philippians 4:1–9 ESV

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement 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 reasonableness⁴ be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **6** do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **9** What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is the word of God.

Thank you Lana.

I think all of us have had moments when we are not sure we trust God. It's just part of the fight of faith. We don't always get what he is doing especially when something challenging is happening.

Years ago, as Karalee and I traveled to see family over Christmas, we stopped in the Eau Claire mall as an easy way to break up the trip, get some shopping done and grab some food. It was a great deal. The mall had a play area for little kids with all kinds of objects (slides, trees, house, trains, etc. – all made out of foam so kids couldn't possibly hurt themselves no matter how clumsy or careless they got.) Karalee had left to shop for a few minutes, and I was enjoying watching Addie and Keaton. They were on opposite sides of the play area so I would look back and forth, back and forth, back, and forth. Well, one of those times got scary. As I looked back in Keaton's direction I couldn't find him. This was common, lots of kids and lots of objects to be inside or behind, usually, your kid would pop back into view in short order. But as my eyes searched and the moments ticked by fear started to grow. Soon I got up and walked over to where Keaton had been

playing – No Keaton. My eyes went on overdrive, my voice began calling for him. No Keaton. Karalee came back and she joined the search. Within a few minutes I was filled with frantic, horrific, and intense fear. I was getting a taste of what it feels like to lose a child, but just a taste. I was praying hard...but I'm not sure how well I was doing with trusting God. I am thankful to God, we found Keaton within minutes, excruciating as they were. He was close by but not in the play area. He was like 3 or 4 at the time, so young he didn't know better – he had seen some racecar type shopping carts that families could rent to push around the mall and tottled over to them. He was sitting inside one, pretending to drive and happy as a clam. I'm not sure how my trust in God would hold up if Keaton had been taken. I cannot imagine how hard it is for the family of 16-year-old Sierra Osborn who was killed in a car accident near Amery a week ago.

Things that challenge us to trust God can happen in a heartbeat, a split second in time that has repercussions that cause turmoil for a long time or they can drag out over years, like illness or injustice. Life on earth will always include difficult circumstances that challenge us to trust God. I see in the verses for today - a way we can tap into the peace of God, that He is always providing for us.

If you recall from previous sermons, this is a wonderful, praise filled letter from Paul to the Philippian church and includes all kinds of instruction on how to be a mature Christian.

If you have not spent time in it, please do. There is no way I can summarize everything from the first three chapters, but here are a few important points. Chapter 1 begins with Paul's thankfulness and praise. He instructs us to live worthy lives and stand firm in the face of opposition to God's love. We should not

be surprised when the opponents of God cause us hardship and suffering. Chapter 2 describes how we encourage and comfort each other because of the difficulty and suffering that come with Gospel work. (enjoy being “team Jesus”)! And God knew that all human beings, the Philippians and us, need instruction on how to be a successful team. So God inspired some of the most raw and truthful words of what Jesus did and how we can be like Him. We are to; consider others more important than ourselves – like Jesus did, to give up any importance we have - like Jesus did, to let ourselves be brought low for the benefit of others - like Jesus did, to be a servant to others - like Jesus did, and to serve others even if it means dying for them - just like Jesus did! I hope I answer the call of dying for someone else if circumstances present me with that challenge. I know that I will for my wife or kids.... like if a person is trying to shoot them, I’m confident I will jump in front of the gun...no question. But will I for anyone? A total stranger? I don’t know. I hope I would. But why? Why would any of us give up our lives willingly for someone else?

Obviously it’s hard for any of us to be like that, to be like Jesus. So, in the middle of chapter 2 God address our attitude. How effective would our church be if we were always prideful and complaining? I don’t think a bunch of overly prideful complainers would be appealing to anyone – so it makes sense that God instructs us to be humble & unified – without grumbling and complaining, so that we would ‘shine’ and unbelievers would have difficulty finding fault with the body of Christ.

And God sends people into our lives to help. He sent Karalee to help me right when Keaton wandered off! I praise Him for that, and I praise God that He sent

so many different people into my life to awaken me to Jesus and keep growing in my faith. I flipped through the church directory as I worked on this part of the message, and it was striking how almost every person listed has touched my life in a helpful way. Thank you East Lincoln. Paul sent people to encourage the Philippians. He sent Epaphroditus back to them along with Timothy. He knew they were worried about Epaphroditus (he had almost died of illness), and Timothy was a proven mentor for the Philippians because he was a “chapter 2” kind of guy” who thought of others more than himself.

And last August – Sunday the 8th I addressed CHAPTER 3 where Paul warned against false teachers, the Judaizes, ‘mutilators of the flesh’ who were teaching that there were requirements, things you do (like get circumcised) to ‘really’ be saved. And Paul addressed those false teachings by proclaiming that everything we do – good and bad – is rubbish compared to the saving work of Jesus Christ (by grace you have been saved – not by works so that no-one can boast – Eph2:8-9)! At the end of Chapter 3 Paul admitted he was far from perfect in keeping himself humble and focused. But, what did Paul do well? He didn’t quit. Paul embraced the forgiveness of Christ and forgot past sins, He strained forward, he pressed on towards the goal pressed on towards the prize, which is eternal life. This is huge – extremely important, we are to keep focused on the eternal goal and prize. He did not strain forward and press on in attaining earthly goals, like so many people do. Jesus himself told us to build up treasures in heaven – not treasures on earth (Matt6:19-20). This all leads us into Chapter 4.

As I read and re-read chapter 4 I think I am correct in seeing God lead Paul to reemphasize certain points as well as add some strategic how to’s for living a

mature Christian life. What is a mature Christian? A disciple of Jesus who is making other disciples. And we are more effective when we are joyful and peaceful. I see a way, a path to peace, with 4 steppingstones, in these verses for today.

1. Standing firm in our faith – can bring peace.
2. Being reasonable with each other – will bring peace.
3. Thinking about the right things, can fuel peace.
4. Practicing these things – will bring OR strengthen peace.

Let's take it verse by verse,

#1 Standing Firm in faith – can bring peace.

Chapter 4:1 – *“Therefore, my fellow brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”*

“Therefore” – is a transitional word that asks us to look back at what was just shared. Paul said at the end of Chapter 3, that we need to keep the “goal” and the “upward call” in mind. The “goal and upward call” is to remember that even when we die, we do not die – our lowly bodies will be renewed with Him as “glorious bodies”. This is a huge and sweet truth for us to “stand firm” on. That we, believers in Christ, people motivated to love others more than ourselves, *“..will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”* (Ps23:6)!

A story that may encourage you comes from Laura Story, the musician (we enjoy singing her song “Mighty to Save”) she shares that when her grandfather was passing the family was gathered around his bed and he began telling them he could see Jesus in the room and that he could see a daughter that had passed away years earlier. Her grandfather was able to give them the gift of telling them

what he was seeing as he was passing over into the heavenly realm. This is an encouraging, real-life story, that displayed how our death is not the end, it's just the beginning.

When we let THAT TRUTH sink into the depths of our soul it will help us proclaim.... "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, where is your sting?" (1Cor15:55). And when you can have that attitude, you will have peace. Amen?

Amen Kent, well said! (I hope!) BUT - That is WAY easier said than done.

Especially when we are presented with the challenges to "stand firm" while those we love face pain and death. I have heard how difficult it was for Matt Chandler – a pastor in Texas, when he got separated from an ambulance that was taking his son to the hospital for a seizure. He didn't know what hospital they were going too – he had no way to contact them. He was alone with the fear of losing his son. Just like my story about Keaton in Eau Claire, we often face extremely hard situations that challenge us to "stand firm" in the Lord. How do we "stand firm" in those moments?

I don't think we can, by ourselves. I don't think God wants us to. We need help, and we should find that help from each other. Lets look at verses 2 & 3.

#2 Be Reasonable with Each Other

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the

gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

(quick side note: – this is a beautiful aspect of our Bible – it has an enormous amount of very specific and accurate information that provide historical credibility to its words! To record specific people like this is just one of the many examples that show the Bible is not fiction. Its real life, with real stories about real people. My side point = The Bible is true!)

But back to the message – we need help to deal with all the difficulties of life and to ‘stand firm’ in our faith. So Paul uses a specific situation to teach everyone to “agree in the Lord”. We don’t learn anything about what the disagreement is, we don’t really need to. All our disagreements in this life will be gone soon enough. Our lives are a “mist” that is here in the morning and gone by noon (James4:14). Think about it this way. Your life is very brief, yes, and yet, as small as you are in the grand scheme of things, God loves you so much that your eternal position with Him is set! When we remember that – why would we let some disagreement with someone in the church get in the way of showing the world how well we love each other? That’s getting at the key. When we are in conflict with each other (as a church) we bring 2 horrible consequences. #1 we will not be able to help each other “stand firm” in difficulty and rob each other of the peace of God – so FORGIVE each other. Christ himself commands us to forgive one another (Matt6:14), to show mercy to each other (Matt18:33). And Verse 4 dials us in, *“Rejoice IN the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.* These women were asked to “agree in the Lord”. They are not asked to agree about the

disagreement! When we “agree in the Lord” we get focused on His forgiveness. When we get focused on His forgiveness we remember how He is forgiving us when we disagree with Him...so we get motivated to do the same to our brothers and sisters. And this brings unity to “team Jesus” and enables the love and support we all desperately need which is rejoicing! Rejoice in the Lord!

Verse 5 *“Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.”* If we are in conflict with each other the ‘light’ we should be shining towards each other (the light of love, forgiveness, encouragement, comfort, sympathy...etc.) is snubbed out. This is the second horrible consequence of being in conflict with each other in the church! Why would anyone who isn’t sure about Jesus want to be involved in a group of people who are unloving, unforgiving, not encouraging, who lack sympathy and make life uncomfortable for each other? That is not displaying reasonableness to everyone!!! Pretty basic – yes. And let me say thank you to all of you at East Lincoln, I think we do well in this area, I think we do shine light in a dark world – but just like any church anywhere, we can get better - lets enjoy getting better, together! Amen!?

Verse 6, *“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make you requests be made known to God.”*

Once again, God understands us. Even when we do help each other – we will still have internal challenges. No matter how well we grow and display maturity in Jesus by loving others, we will have personal doubts and difficulties – anxieties. And God tells us to Pray. Instead of dwelling on our anxieties – bring them to Him in prayer with thanksgiving. Remember, even if you are facing death you have

something to be thankful for. I hinted at this earlier when I asked – why would any of us be willing to die for someone else?

Because ultimately, even if I die – I don't die – I gain, Phil1:21, who should I fear when I know God is the stronghold of my life, Ps27:1, Isaiah 41:10 *"Fear not for I am with you , do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"*, and Ps118:6 *"The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"* I was struck by a quote from the biography of Clancy Lynall, "Silver Eagle". Clancy was a member of the 101st airborne in WW2. He says this about a commander he knew, Lt. Spiers, *"As a combat leader you couldn't find anyone better than Ronald Speirs. He had this mind-set around him: 'Don't worry about getting killed because you're already dead. Just move forward and when it's your time, it's your time.'* "

We can leave our worries behind way better when we remember, when it's our time, it's our time. We can be thankful as children of God, knowing He always has our BEST interest in mind and, no matter what, we get to be with Him!

When we pray and ask for help with whatever is causing anxiety and remember to be thankful for being His child, a peace that surpasses all understanding will come to our hearts and minds. I have experienced this personally many times.

I also suffer from praying,

being thankful,

enjoying the peace of God..... in one minute,

and return to anxiety a minute later –....

which is why, I think, God tells us to ¹⁶ *Rejoice always,* ¹⁷ *pray without ceasing,* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* (1Thes5:16-18). Randy referenced this verse on Wednesday at our Thanksgiving eve service – thank you Randy. And remember, we are told to rejoice IN the Lord – Not rejoice in the difficulty. This can also help kill anxiety. The family who just lost their 16 year old daughter a week ago does not rejoice in her death – but they can rejoice IN the goodness of God that is ALWAYS with them. All of us can find peace in His love for us and in our love for each other. This is a mindset and how to think, which is where God leads us next....

#3 Thinking About the Right Things Can Fuel Peace

Verse 8, Paul writes “finally” for the second time! He wrote “finally” at the beginning of Chapter 3 and didn’t actually mean it.... typical preacher...but now he means it, he writes, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* Here we get a bunch of fuel for our minds to assist in keeping a joyful and peaceful mindset.

This made me think about Jesus teaching in Luke Chapter 6, verses 43&45 they say...*“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”* We should use these words like fertilizer for our hearts and minds.

Please, enjoy the excellent works and deeds worthy of praise that are accomplished for Jesus, ...that we accomplish together, as a church, and think about the things can do soon – to help people know and love Jesus.

And a warning here, watch out for “the power of positive thinking”, it’s a way the devil and the world take and twist God’s word to make us believe doing truthful, honorable and just things for non-salvation reasons – are good enough. The enemy and the world want us to think about pure, excellent, lovely things that are commendable and bring praise to the task or people as the goal. No, no that’s not the goal, that will not produce lasting joy and peace. We should think about all these wonderful things to bring praise to God – that kind of thinking will bring joy and peace. It should also lead to actions.

Which brings us to the close for today.

#4 Practicing these things – will strengthen peace

Verse 9.. *practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* If we practice these how to’s for making gains as Christians, we WILL enjoy the peace of God. How basic and practical does God get....don’t just hear my words....do them (Jam1:22).

I do hope this helps. We are promised by God that as His children our eternal existence is set – nothing can separate a believer from the love of Christ (Rom8:38). That kind of truth brings the ability to “stand firm’ in our faith no matter what comes. Yet even with that promise of God ringing in our soul, our own human frailty needs help from other brothers and sisters. Thank you for being my church family. Let’s keep getting better at sharing Jesus with those

around us and add to His church. But let us also get better at setting aside our disagreements. Let's get better at setting aside non-gospel issues – those almost always bring division and tension instead of allowing our church family to be seen as agreeable and reasonable with each other. Be there for each other in growing measure. And of course, enjoy praying to God – your perfect Father. Trust Him – remember that as one of His children He will do what is best for you. Let that truth bring you peace. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb12:1) so spend time reading God's word and look for news about the wonderful things people of God have done and are doing! If you practice these things peace will come – but not because of any guaranteed success. Real peace is found in remembering that no matter what – no matter what kind of success I hear about or don't hear about, whatever success I have or don't have in this life – the final destination is set. I WILL dwell in the house of the Lord forever! That anchor of truth will never move. Praise God. Let's pray.

Benediction – Rom 15:13 **13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.