

Peace, Please.4.Thanksgiving
Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We're in Philippians 4 tonight, if you'd care to turn there with me. Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 – 7.

Pause

- 1: Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
- 2: The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
- 3: And bathed every veyne in swich licour
- 4: Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
- 5: Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
- 6: Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
- 7: Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
- 8: Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
- 9: And smale foweles maken melodye,
- 10: That slepen al the nyght with open ye
- 11: (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
- 12: Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
- 13: And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
- 14: To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
- 15: And specially from every shires ende
- 16: Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,
- 17: The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
- 18: That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

You can join in with me if you want – there are only 16 more lines.

Anybody know what that is?

That is the first 18 lines to the general prologue of the Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer – in middle English.

That was also half of my mid-term grade in 11th grade English class in high school.

I remember very clearly when Mrs. Gabbert, our teacher, put the assignment on the board – you had to recite, without notes, 18 lines to get an A. 14 lines of it to get a B. 10 to get a C. 5 to get a D.

I thought, “There is no way I can do this.”

And I wasn’t alone in my doubts.

After a few days of dealing with this, most of the class went into full mutiny mode.

We can’t do this.

It’s too hard.

Too many lines.

Besides, it’s middle English – we don’t even know what it means.

So Mrs. Gabbert sat us down and said, “Look you sissies...of course you can do this. The key is **rehearsal**. Keep saying it, over and over and over and pretty soon, it will be there so obviously, you’ll never be able to forget it. It’ll become part of who you are.”

At the time I thought, “Yeah, right.”

But I did do what she said...I said those lines every day, over and over again.

And just as she promised, it did get easier and easier...and you know, when the day came to give it in class, it was no problem at all.

And here we are...36 years later, and I still know it. It really has become a part of me.

I still don’t know what it means, but it’s become a part of me.

The point is, the way to peace is through **rehearsal**.

Peace comes by **rehearsing** over and over again what we know to be true, so that eventually, we have those things planted so firmly within us, they just become a part of who we are.

Then, when there’s a crisis, when there’s uncertainty or trouble or sickness in life, we have this reserve of truth

inside us to draw from, and we can remain peaceful, no matter what the situation.

As we've already said these past Sunday nights, the most sought after commodity in our world today, isn't really oil or computer chips or nuclear warheads or a cure for Covid or even toilet paper.

The most sought after commodity in our world today is peace. People all over the world are looking for it. Individuals, families, nations...everybody wants peace.

And you know, Jesus Himself tells us, in John chapter 14 specifically, that peace is available. Jesus tells us, "***Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Don't let your hearts be troubled...don't be afraid.***"

Jesus announces right here, "You ***can have*** peace."

So on the one hand, we have a world that desperately wants peace and is trying everything to get it.

On the other hand, we've got Jesus here in Scripture saying that ***He's got it***...He's got peace, and He's ready to give it.

The question is, "How do we bring all this together? How do Christians offer the peace of God to our world?"

Well, before we can offer it to the world, we've got to make sure we have it ourselves, right? We can't give something away that we don't have to give.

And in spite of all the offers of peace in the Bible and in spite of **all** the commands in Scripture for Christians to be **peaceful**, why is it that so many today seem as "peaceless" as the world around us?

How can **we** get hold of this peace that Jesus offers?

The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4 that **we can have peace**. In fact, he says that you and I can have the **same** peace that **he** had, which is no small thing, considering all that Paul had lived through.

Paul wrote this very letter from prison. He wrote it while he was waiting on a verdict that **could've** sent him to his **death**.

And yet he says to us, "I am at peace, and you can be at peace too."

And Paul tells us how:

Verse 6, Paul says: "Don't be anxious about **anything**, but **in everything**, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God. And the **peace of God**, that surpasses all understanding,

will **guard** your **hearts** and your **thoughts** in Christ Jesus.”

“Don’t be anxious about anything...”

How do we give up our anxiety? How do we get this **peace of God** to guard our hearts and minds?

Paul says we get it through **prayer** and **petition, with thanksgiving**.

Prayer and petition – taking the time to talk with God and to listen to Him; telling Him our concerns and our requests. **Talking** to Him about those things in our lives that are **tempting us to worry**.

When we ask God to help us in those specific situations that are chipping away at our peace, that’s petition.

And then Paul says, **whenever** we talk to God, we should do so **with thanksgiving**. Our petitions should be **covered** with thanksgiving. Let an attitude of thanksgiving **saturate** your prayers.

You see, offering thanks to God is our **spiritual rehearsal**.

When we offer thanks to God, we **rehearse...we review** in our minds and with our mouths the truths about all that God has done for us in the past.

The very **act of thanksgiving**, of speaking our thanks to God, causes us to remember all over again the times when God **delivered** us, we remember the times He **healed** us, the times He **provided** for us and **comforted** us.

And as we remember those times, we realize all over again that, no matter how critical our circumstance, we are not in it alone. We're reminded again that we're loved by a great and powerful and faithful and God.

And so as we give thanks to God, as we remember all that He has done, as we remember who it is that we serve, you see, our faith is strengthened, our confidence in God is built up, and we realize, like Paul realized, that no matter what, our present situation is no match for the power of God working in our lives, just like He's done in the past.

The rehearsal of the goodness of God...that's thanksgiving, and it works!

Pause

Have you ever noticed that the whole model of culture and worship God prescribed for His people, Israel, was a system of rehearsal?

The feasts, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the Passover – everything in their culture pointed **backward...**to help

them remember what God had done in days past...so they could give thanks for the greatness of their God...so that they could walk **forward** as a people, with peace.

I remember Thane Ury, several years ago, talking about this – how God wants His people to walk backward into the future, looking at all He'd done in the past, in order that they'd have faith for the future they would not see.

That's where we get the peace to face the future...by looking backward – rehearsing what God has done already in thanksgiving.

That helps us remember who's really in control of things.

It helps us remember that **God** is God and we're **not**...and we don't have to be.

Pause

Every year, at least for a while, we watch the Macy's parade on Thanksgiving Day, and the commentators and their guests – entertainers and politicians – they all talk about their thanksgiving traditions and how they are so grateful for all they have.

But I can't help but wonder, "Are they really grateful? To whom are they grateful? Do they know the God I know? Maybe they do, but so often, at least what I know about their lives doesn't reveal that."

I mean, it's hard to be truly thankful, or to even understand thanksgiving, if you don't acknowledge the God to whom all thanks is due.

In fact, the whole concept...the holiday of thanksgiving is really rather meaningless without God in the picture. It just becomes empty sentiment - a nice-sounding, but totally worthless emotion.

And I'm afraid that, in our country's vague thanksgiving, there's a lot of Americans that heap judgment upon themselves and offend God by not crediting **Him** and thanking **Him** for the good in their lives.

And so any sort of lasting peace alludes them.

Pause

The Thanksgiving holiday should always remind us that our world is not sufficient unto itself.

Thanksgiving should remind us that the world needs Jesus, so it can respond appropriately to Him.

So they can have someone to give their thanks **to**.

So they can have the peace of knowing that they don't have to carry their burdens alone.

They need to be introduced to Jesus so they can know that, even in death, there is hope and triumph.

Pause

I wonder if the world sees the peace of God in us?

Is our thankful spirit evident...on more than one day a year?

Do you rehearse thanksgiving, so that when difficulty comes, what immediately comes to mind and heart is, "I don't have to get all tied up about this. I've seen God take care of far bigger things, so surely He can take care of this. So I will walk on with faith."

That's the sort of peace our world is looking for, especially in these days.

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but something more than Covid has happened in our culture in these last months. There is a layer...a drape...of carelessness and insecurity and great anxiety about the future covering much of our society.

More than ever, our world needs to see examples of both purpose and peace...purpose for today and peace for tomorrow, whatever may come. This is what followers of Christ must be. We have this gift that the world very desperately needs.

Closing Prayer: Father, we thank you tonight for your blessings in our lives this past year. Thank you that you've loved us and sustained us; You've given great happiness and excitement and joy.

And Lord, You've also walked with us through difficult days, giving us strength to bear confusion and uncertainty, and pain and sorrow. You've added to some of our families, you've taken away from others. And yet, here we stand, because of your marvelous and amazing grace.

Help us to be thankful people – people who walk backward into the future, with our attention fixed, not on the unknowns to come, but on what we already know about you...what we've seen you do in past days.

Help us to constantly rehearse your faithfulness in our lives, so we, ourselves, can be people of deep peace and gratitude, and so we might show a "peaceless" world that hope and peace and joy can be found in Jesus.