

An Uprising of Gratitude
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A Reflection for Thanksgiving Sunday

Philippians 4:4-7

October 13, 2019

Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

I'm going to focus in on the first part of the Scripture. The second half is great. It's the first that got hold of me for this Thanksgiving.

Paul the letter-writer gave three encouragements or, really, commands. Each is wonderful. Each also has a word tacked on that makes it hard.

First one: *Be glad in the Lord . . . always!* He says it twice: "*Be glad!*" When things are well, be happy. When times are tough, take heart and have courage.¹ *Be glad!* Wonderful! But *always?* Hard.

Next: *Let your gentleness show in your treatment of . . . all people!* It would be great if Christians were known for our gentleness. Too often we are not. We reflect the harshness of our world, rather than the open-heartedness of Jesus. *Let your gentleness show!* Wonderful But to *all* people? Hard.

Finally: *Don't be anxious . . . about anything!* I'd love to be freed from anxiety. Counselling helps me. Medication helps me. What I need most is the Holy the Spirit to continue deepening and firming-up my trust in God. *Don't be anxious!* Wonderful. But *about anything?* Hard.

O yes, it's Thanksgiving. *Gratitude!* Wonderful. *Gratitude.* Hard.

II

I'm so much better at grabbing, and griping, and being gloomy.

Elections don't help. It's not so much the quality of candidates or leaders, parties or policies. It's always been messy.

I am realizing more what our politics does to me.

It makes me more grabby. They want my vote, so they appeal to my greed. *What's in it for me?* I'm already greedy. But these appeals to my self-interest cultivate that. I become less grateful.

¹ Doug Bratt, "Philippians 4:4-7" Sermon Starter for December 10, 2018. Calvin Centre for Excellence in Preaching. cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/advent-3c/?type=lectionary_epistle

Our politics makes me gripe more. My grievances are rewarded. I want to vote for whoever tells me I'm right in my grumpiness. Of course, there are things we are right to be upset about. Often, though, it's my attitude that's wrong, my sense of privilege and entitlement. I become less grateful.

Our politics makes me gloomy. Of course I am very worried about our climate. I am very worried about our unwillingness to deal with our racism. I am very worried that true justice for Indigenous peoples is still a long way off. It's easy to be gloomy. Still, I become less grateful.

III

So I'm grabby, I'm griping, and I'm gloomy. And I'm looking at Paul's letter to Christians in Philippi. Paul wrote this in prison. He was accused of disturbing public order because of his allegiance to Jesus. He was awaiting trial. He knew it could result in his execution. He was also worried about the Christian congregations he'd started, like this one in Philippi.

In his letter he was honest about this. He bared his heart. And, he infused it with joy. Time and again he wrote about rejoicing. Whether he lived or died, he was going to rejoice. Whether he was filled with food or starving, he was going to rejoice. If he ended up safe or stayed in danger, he was going to rejoice.

He wanted his friends to whom he was writing, to rejoice.

The Holy Spirit, who filled them with joy, wants us to rejoice. And be filled with gratitude.

IV

What did Paul see that we need to know?

He saw this: "*The Lord is near.*" In Christ, God promises never to leave or abandon us. God is with us. Surely, God is in this place. Wherever we go, God will be there.

It seems Paul also thought the Lord Jesus would return in his fullness, and soon, to bring all history to its goal. We are many, many centuries later. It hasn't happened yet! Still, this promise, that our future belongs to God, holds us.

My practice of grabbing, my habit of griping, and my pall of gloominess: they are overcome by that assurance of joy. "*The Lord is near!*" You are held. We are held together. Our world and its future are held in the promise of God.

Paul saw that "*the Lord is near.*" He also saw this: "*God's peace keeps us.*" Behind the word "keeps" is a Greek word that means "to guard." God's peace guards us. It's a picture of someone guarding a city, to defend it if it is attacked. God surrounds us with peace. This peace is not just freedom from conflict and danger, though of course that is important. It's a broad sense of being whole and being well. That peace, God's peace, guards us.

Remember, Paul was in jail. He was guarded, and those guards threatened his life. But he knew, no matter what they might do to him, even the worst, God's peace truly kept him and guarded him well.

V

The Lord is near to us. God's peace guards us.

When we know this, when God is filling us with these truths, we become grateful.

And in our culture of grabbing, griping and gloom, gratitude is revolutionary. It is an uprising, a rebellion of life.

We are freed from grabbing. We are no longer trapped in getting for ourselves and getting what we think we deserve. Sure, we all have needs. We also live in God's abundance. So we can live, grateful.

We are freed from griping. We are no longer trapped in our complaints and our grievances. Sure, there are things to be bothered about. We also live guarded in God's peace. So we can live, grateful.

We are freed from gloom. We are not longer trapped in despair over the challenges that confront us, that we seem unable, or unwilling, to face. These are big problems. We also live knowing that God is near. So we can live, grateful.

So, I come back to where I began.

Filled with gratitude for God's peace and God's presence, you can "*be glad in the Lord, always!*"

Filled with gratitude for God's peace and God's presence, you can "*let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people.*"

Filled with gratitude for God's peace and God's presence, you need not "*be anxious about anything.*"

God, thank You! Amen.