

4th August, 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's

Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

All hail the power of Jesus' name!
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem,
and crown him Lord of all!

Let every tongue and every tribe
responsive to his call,
to him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all.
To him all majesty ascribe,
and crown him Lord of all!

O seed of Israel's chosen race
now ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace,
and crown him Lord of all.
Hail him who saves you by his
grace,
and crown him Lord of all!

Oh, that with all the sacred throng
we at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.
We'll join the everlasting song
and crown him Lord of all.

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read Philippians 4:10-23 and John 6:35-40

Content in all circumstances

Paul is still talking about the same things as he was when we started this series in April (and using the same words to talk about them). See how he uses commercial language: because of the gift the Philippians sent him, Paul has money on his mind, and he is using it to get across some major spiritual messages.

We need first to clarify a verse which is sometimes misunderstood, and then we can look at the overall picture of what Paul is saying as he winds up his letter.

Verse 13 is sometimes misunderstood to mean that a Christian should be able to do anything at all. As a result, some Christians have felt like failures, lacking in faith, because they are aware of their limitations. The modern translations put this right. The NIV renders it “I can do *all this ...*” – i.e. I can be content in all economic circumstances.

So what is the true basis for contentment? **Why are Christians content?**

1. It is not that we are guaranteed material resources.

We often misinterpret verses like v.19 “My God will meet all your needs ...” or John 6:35 “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry ...”, or John 16:23 “If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you”.

So where is my Volvo? It is an observable fact that God does not provide financial security to all his children – there are many poor Christians. Either God is a promise-breaker, or we are not reading these verses right. Why would Paul say he has learned to be content with plenty or hunger, if God guarantees at least a middle-class lifestyle?

2. Nor is it that we are grimly content like the ancient Stoics.

Their attitude was the one expressed by Victorian poems like Kipling’s *If*, which says:

*If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat these two imposters just the same.*

and W.E. Henley's *Invictus*

*Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

...

*I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

Christian contentment is fundamentally different from this. It was expressed by George Findlay as "*an independence of the world through dependence upon God*", so that the Stoic and the Christian "*both stand erect and fearless before a persecuting world: one with a look of rigid, defiant scorn, the other with a face now lighted up with unutterable joy in God*".

3. No, it is because we *are* guaranteed what *really* matters.

What *does* he promise to supply? Look at the last verse of our gospel reading: "*For my father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day*" (Jn. 6:40).

What our heavenly Father has promised is that he will supply what we really need, and that is not limited to material things. Our relationship with him is unbreakable and so, as we saw last week (vv.4-7) our joy is indestructible. And since this is so, our material resources and wants fade into the background, where they belong.

One final point: this sort of contentment is a hard-learned lesson (v.11). Paul makes it quite clear that even he had had to be "*very thoroughly initiated into the human lot with all its ups and downs*" (v12 NEB). But his joy has been renewed by the care that his friends in Philippi have shown him, in the very simple (and perhaps very costly) form of sending him money to support him in his difficult circumstances. In the same way, our hard-learned contentment can be fanned into joy by the care that we show each other as we work together in the partnership of the Gospel.

10th Sunday after Trinity: Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- Tea and Chat: August 21st at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: August 21st at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: August 28th at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: 3pm Sunday, TBA
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at
<https://www.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>