



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for November 14, 2021
"Partnership in Contentment"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Philippians 4:10-13

Together We Can Do So Much More

Recently, we have been saying that *"there are just some things we can do together that we can't if left to ourselves."* I have always felt that's the case. I have seen that play out time and time again in the church.

Helen Keller says it much more succinctly, *"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much more."* I hope we embrace that and seek to live it out.

During this season in which we consider our financial stewardship and our grateful response to Christ and his church, *"together we can do so much more"* is the very thing we need to be talking about. That togetherness reflects the *"partnership"* that is ours in Christ. Like Paul and the Philippian Church we are *"partners in the gospel."*

Mutual Admiration for Christ and One Another

We talked about that last week. Paul and the Philippian Church were joined together in a mutual admiration for Christ and for one another. Paul prayed with joy about the relationship he had with the Philippian Church. He thought the world of them.

The Philippian Church also had high regard for Paul and his ministry. That high regard was demonstrated no more clearly than by the generous gift they sent his way while he was under house arrest in Rome. Paul highlighted that gift and his thankfulness for it as he wrote to the church in Philippi.

Paul also took the opportunity to share a bit about how he approached life when it came to money and God taking care of his need. Paul talked about contentment and what a profound difference it made in his life. Let's read about that as we turn to Philippians 4:10-13.

Philippians 4:10-13

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Two Tents

Leadership guru, John Maxwell asserts that everyone lives in one of two tents. They are either living in the tent of contentment or the tent of discontentment. And as you might guess, Maxwell asks the question, *“In which do you live?”* Hear what he has to say about such things.

- *The contented person looks beyond his/her circumstances and see a better day; the discontented person looks at his/her circumstances and sees no other way.*
- *The contented person is surrendered to a purpose that demands his/her best; the discontented person who has selfishly hoarded much and grasps for more, will not rest.*
- *The contented person has placed his/her values on things which will last forever; the discontented person has placed his/her values on things which will soon be past.*
- *The contented person counts his/her blessings and names them one by one; the discontented person counts the blessings of others and is jealous.*

“All people,” he says, “live in one of two tents—content or discontent. In which do you live?”

I have thought about such things and figure:

- The contented are at peace, while the discontented are always anxious.
- The contented are fulfilled, while the discontented are always longing.
- The contented live with purpose, while the discontented are always searching.
- The contented live with meaning, while the discontented are always lacking.

Covetousness

We live in a time when enough is never enough. We just can't seem to get settled. Our gaze wanders to what somebody else has and we wish it was so for us. God calls that *“covetousness.”*

In regard to such things, you might want to pause and evaluate your life and how often you longingly look at the lives of others around you: their house, job, family, opportunities, wealth, children, friends, outward appearance, schooling, and even ministry.

God tells us that when we put our sights on what another person has, we are coveting, and coveting promotes holding on to what we have. Instead of being generous, we hold on for dear life. God wants us to keep our sights on him and not what others have.

When that happens:

- We are more apt to notice what blessings we have and give him thanks.
- Our trust abounds.
- We are much less tempted.
- We are certainly less apt to grumble and complain.

The Secret of Being Content

Paul had given up that sort of struggle. Paul had set his sights clearly on Christ and in Christ found the strength to persevere, regardless of his circumstance. Paul lets us in on a little secret in our passage for today. To the contrary, it's a big secret. It is the sort of secret that has everything with the way we live our lives.

In Philippians 4:12, Paul talks about *“the secret of being content in any and every circumstance.”* He talks about being content *“whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”* And in talking about such things, he challenges us to center ourselves in Christ.

In referencing *“the secret of being content,”* Maxie Dunham writes about Christians having *“amazing coping skills.”* I like that. Those *“amazing coping skills”* are not because of anything we do, but what God does in us. Our sufficiency is in him and because of that we are able to make our way through whatever circumstance we face.

Paul, in writing to the Philippian Church about *“the secret of contentment,”* is acting like a financial advisor, except Paul is not touting an investment in this stock or that bond, but rather investing our all in Christ. He challenges all who will listen to put Christ above all.

We have been talking about that sort of thing in my small group on Wednesday evenings as we have been making our way through Francis Chan’s book, *Crazy Love*.

Chan says this, *“When you are truly in love, you go to great lengths to be with the one you love. You’ll drive for hours to be together, even if it’s only for a short while. You don’t mind staying up late to talk. Walking in the rain is romantic, not annoying. You’ll willingly spend a small fortune on the one you’re crazy about. When you are apart from each other, it’s painful, even miserable. You jump at any chance to be together.”*

Christ above all.

- In him our needs are taken care of.
- We are deeply fulfilled.
- The cares of this world don’t seem so weighty.
- And the unsettledness of our hearts is stilled, and contentment begins to flow.

Godliness with Contentment

Contentment is on Paul’s heart when he writes to young Timothy in I Timothy 6:6ff.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

People who want to get rich fall into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

“Godliness with contentment” is the key that unlocks the door to the sort of life God wants us to live when it comes to the incessant draw of stuff upon our lives. I like the fact that Paul links *“godliness”* with *“contentment.”* Living godly lives is what we’re trying to promote around here. It also plays heavily into the way we invest our money.

You have heard me talk about *“up, in, and out”* in conjunction with living a balanced life. *Up, in, and out”* also applies to the church.

- Up, reaching toward God.
- In, reaching toward others.
- And out, reaching toward those beyond us.

Narrative Budget—Worship, Discipleship, Missions

We might apply the same in considering a narrative budget.

Worship is a central focus of our church. Each year we invest around 16% of our Ministry Budget on things related to worship and music. Worship gives us the opportunity to offer our praise and thanksgiving to God, and God blesses us in that. Worship also inspires us to be more deeply committed disciples. *“We enter to worship and depart to serve.”*

Our efforts at **Discipleship** have supported a growing number of people who meet regularly in small groups. Each group digs deeply into the scripture, seeks to apply what’s learned, and generally grapples with what it means to be a disciple. We invest right at 5% of our Ministry Budget on things related to discipleship.

Strong discipleship leads to a consideration of being involved in the world. We support several missions and missionaries. Through Love Local, we support Highpoint Charitable Services, Grace Kids, the Bread of Life Food Pantry, and Habitat for Humanity. Love Local promotes not only financial support, but actually serving. Our support of Conference and District Benevolences gives us a great opportunity to reach near and far through the ministry of the broader United Methodist Church. Annually, we invest right at 16% toward **Missions** through the Ministry Budget of the church.

Living a godly life is measured, in large part, as we worship, as we grow as disciples, and as we reach out into the world. I am gratified we invest heavily in all three.

I Am Able to Endure

You see it on the back of t-shirts all the time. It is an oft-quoted passage. It is one many have committed to memory. *“I can do all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me.”* Philippians 4:13

I don’t know about you, but that passage emboldens me to no end. My good friend, Ben Witherington translates that passage this way, *“I can **endure** all things in Christ Jesus who strengthens me.”* All of that borne out of a deep sense of contentment that has its foundation in the sufficiency of Christ.

“Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, and to take him at his word; just to rest upon his promise, and to know, Thus saith the Lord. Jesus, Jesus, how I trust him! How I’ve proved him o’er and o’er! Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust him more!”

I have been thinking a lot this week about that and the correlation between contentment and generosity. I figure that if we are truly content in Jesus, and trusting in his provision for our lives, then we can’t help but be generous. We have nothing to worry about, whether in plenty or want. Christ is with us and that is all we need. He proves himself over and over again. Why not be generous?

Prayer

Pray with me. *“Blessed God, thank you for the partnership we share in the gospel. We seek to live in that partnership to the end that your good purposes come to pass. Thank you, Lord, for calling us together as a church. Amen”*