

Philippians 4:6–20
“Content in Christ”
Thanksgiving Day

November 22, 2017
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

Lou Gehrig’s Disease – it is a brutal disease to say the least.
It is a disease that causes the brain to lose control of the body’s muscles.

It’s one of the cruel ironies of history
that a disease notorious for crippling people quickly and severely
should strike someone as relentless as Lou Gehrig.

Gehrig played for the New York Yankees from 1923 until 1939,
and he was known as the “Iron Horse.”

For nearly sixty years, he held the record of 2,130 consecutive games played.
For nearly sixty years, it was thought the record was unbreakable,
until Cal Ripken in 1995.

But what was most startling, most memorable, about Lou Gehrig
was his farewell speech delivered to a packed crowd at Yankee Stadium
when he retired prematurely due to the onslaught of ALS.

He said and I quote:

“Fans, for the past two weeks, you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.”

Those words seem so foreign and so unthinkable in our age
when far too many expect life to be delivered to them
pristine and unblemished on a silver platter.

Pervasive in American culture is the thought – “I deserve better than this.”

What a contrast to the words of Lou Gehrig
in which we hear a man who is content ...
content in spite of the difficult lot he’s been dealt in life.

[Paul is Content]

In our text, St. Paul proclaims he is content!

Now, the fullness of what he's teaching only becomes apparent
when we know the conditions in which Paul writes.

Philippians is one of Paul's captivity letters.

He's under house arrest in Rome and in chains for the sake of the Gospel.

He can't go anywhere – locked in the house.

He's done nothing to deserve such treatment.

All he's done is proclaim the love of God in Christ.

And even though he is locked away – he says,

“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (vv 11–13).

“Plenty and hunger, abundance and need.”

That's the stark contrast between Paul's situation and ours.

This thanksgiving we are sure to sit at a table filled with turkey and stuffing.

And before the day's done, we will have enjoyed a feast with our family and friends.

And afterwards, when we push back from the table, we could exclaim, “Life is good!”

If I used social media, I'd post a picture with the caption #LifeIsGood.

Paul has none of that.

But if he'd had social media, he would have posted

a picture of himself in chains with the caption #Content.

[Content in Christ]

How can Paul be content? The secret to Paul's contentment is Christ.

As long as your attention is focused on yourself,

you will not find true contentment.

This is what Martin Luther called belly-button gazing.

Staring at your navel, eyes fixed on yourself will not lead to contentment.

And eyes fixed on others will not bring

you contentment because comparison

is the death of contentment.

Eyes fixed on the feast spread before
you and your family this day will not
bring contentment either.

But fixing your eyes on Christ will bring contentment even in the darkest times.

Paul says he is content because

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (v 13).

Let's be clear...

Paul doesn't have delusions of grandeur,
that Christ will make all his troubles disappear.

Paul doesn't have delusions of grandeur
that the four walls of his house arrest will stop closing in to open to an oasis.

No, no, no....

Paul anticipates on-going suffering and even death at the hands of the enemies of Christ.

Yet Paul knows that none of that can rob him of Christ.

Paul can do all things through Christ who strengthens him so that no matter what he faces he will remain strong in Christ.

Suffering cannot rob him of Christ.

Death cannot even rob Paul of Christ.

Paul is content in all circumstances because his contentment is grounded not in his circumstances, but in Christ. And so is yours.

Some of you are not going home to the feast you desire it to be.

Some of you won't be blessed by the fellowship of family that you've enjoyed in the past.

Death has parted you from loved ones

or family strife has robbed you of sharing a thanksgiving meal.

Yet contentment remains yours ...

Yet contentment remains yours in Christ!

None of that can rob you of Christ.

That doesn't mean it's easy—on Thanksgiving Day or on any other day.

Paul didn't have it easy in prison and you don't have it easy as you face this life.

But you don't bear it alone.

Christ is with you to shoulder your burden.

He has already carried your burden to his cross.

And he has risen triumphant from the grave, victorious over your burden.

So Christ strengthens you just as he strengthened Paul.

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Christ’s strength is bound up in what he delivers to you.

If you are without feasting on Thanksgiving Day,
Christ promises that the Day is coming when he will deliver an eternal feast to you.

AND If you are feasting on Thanksgiving Day,
Christ promises that the coming feast dwarfs what you have today.
A banquet table spread for all. That is contentment.

If death has separated you from someone you love,
you are not alone, for Christ dwells with you.
If division prevents you
from sitting at table with parent, child, spouse, sibling, or friend,
Christ comes to assure you that he has brought you peace.

Peace with the Father.
Sin once divided you from the Father,
but Christ has reconciled you to the Father by his cross. That is contentment.

And there’s more.
The Day is coming when there will be a full and perfect reunion
for all those who’ve lived and died with faith in Christ.
The Day is coming when death will not separate us, for death will be destroyed.
The Day is coming when all our divisions will be overcome by Christ
as we are perfectly united with him,
and so we will be perfectly united with one another.

Until that great Day,
Christ sustains you,
providing you with his perfect companionship, that you might not lose heart.

This is what Paul is talking about when he says,
“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

This is the secret to Paul’s contentment and yours as well.

Christ Brings You Contentment Because in Him You Have It All. Amen!

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will,
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
