

True Contentment  
Philippians 4:2-14, Matthew 6:25-34  
The First United Presbyterian Church of Crafton Heights  
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Imagine this. Your friend walks into the room and says, "All right, I have good news, and I have bad news."

OK, give me the good news.

"You're going to be in the Bible. I just saw a draft of one of Paul's letters, and your name is in it! People are going to be talking about you for thousands of years!"

And the bad news?

"Your name is Euodia or Syntyche. All people will know about you is that you couldn't get along with your sister in Christ."

Yeah, that's a mixed blessing, isn't it? Think about that. These two women show up here, and only here, in all of recorded history. Everything that we know about them is contained in this brief passage. Couldn't get along...

Makes me wonder...what if my life had to be summed up in a single phrase? What would you say? Dave Carver...sure liked to talk...heck of a singles hitter...kind of nosy...What would they say about you? That's a humbling thought, isn't it?

Well, Euodia and Syntyche, you can't get along. How about that? And how about Paul, putting it out there. As we've said, Paul didn't realize that he was writing the Bible, so he didn't expect you or me to reading this note today, but it's clearly a note that is to be read in public. At a worship service. And here he is, calling these people out.

Can you imagine that? Really? "Kelly, Steve – what the heck is wrong with you people? Can't you work things out? Mollie, will you get over there and see if you can't figure out what the problem is?" Shoot. I'd be fired in ten minutes if I pulled a stunt like that in the middle of worship. Why would Paul say that to his congregation?

Well, apparently, he expected that the church would actually help these women work things out. He's not saying that they are bad people, or that their faith is deficient. He's saying that they ought to get together, and he's suggesting that the rest of the church can help. The reason he is calling them out in public is because he expects that the church will work to correct the problem and move on in the ministry to which Christ has called them. The church is expected to act to help these women deal with the problem and then keep on in ministry.

Wow. What would it take for us to be that kind of community? What would it take for us to be the kind of community where we named issues like that and dealt with them without assigning blame or gossiping or backbiting?

Well, thinking off the top of my head, I'd say that we'd need to have at least four things present in order to be that kind of community. First, we'd need to have a presumption of trust. We would need to have complete trust in each other's motives and character. Second, we'd need to be centered around the idea that it's about Jesus, not me. We'd have to be able to echo Paul's statement earlier in Philippians: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain..." Third, we'd need to be able to remember that our focus in this life is to love and serve our neighbors, not the other way around. And fourthly, we'd need to be community that was steeped in humility. If we were that kind of a trusting, Christ-centered, servant, humble community, then we'd be able to have Paul walk in here and name our issues publicly.

How do you get there? How do you become a person that can build that kind of community? How do you join together with other people into the kind of community that loves each other enough to ask the hard questions?

You stand in a new place. Literally, we have to move. We have to re-shape our very identity by being something new.

If you were to get out your bibles and look again at Philippians chapter 4, you'd discover something that fascinates me. Four different times in verses 1-13, Paul uses the phrase, "in the Lord." "Stand firm in the Lord", "Be of the same mind in the Lord", "Rejoice in the Lord." He also uses the phrase "in Christ Jesus" once and "through Christ" another time. Six times in those few paragraphs, he calls the little church in Philippi to be centered in Christ.

And he fleshes that out, too. He says that this re-orientation will be measured by their ability to rejoice, to be gentle, to not worry, and to pray. I know that a few weeks ago we said that Philippians only has one "Jesus Story" in it, in Chapter two, but doesn't this part of the letter sound like what was read for us in the Gospel according to Matthew? Doesn't this sound like the Sermon on the Mount?

Paul takes it a little further and says that if we are able to train ourselves to think and behave like this, then the peace of God will guard our hearts (in Christ Jesus). This is an interesting term that Paul uses here – it's a military term, one that would have made sense in a military town – a "colony of Rome" like Philippi. He's saying that if we can center ourselves in being people who are anchored in prayer and known for our gentleness, people who are able to rejoice in all things and not anxious about anything, then we will be people who knew what it's like to be secure in Christ's peace. Preacher Fred Craddock says it this way: "Because God's peace is on duty, [we] do not have to be anxiously scanning the horizon for new threats. Alert, yes. Anxious, no."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Interpretation* Commentary on Philippians (Atlanta: John Knox 1985), p. 72.

“I’m not sure, Carver. You make it sound easy, but I know it’s tough to live like that...” Paul is reading your minds, because he then goes on to give us another clue about how to live in that kind of peace. He shares a litmus test for our thought lives. He says that we ought to be filling our minds and hearts with thoughts that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy.

Think about that. And then think about the last television show you watched, or the book that you’re reading, or the internet sites you’ve visited.

I had this brought to my attention the other day. My wife’s computer was on the fritz, so she had to use mine. And she noticed that my internet provider opened up to a site called “The Onion”, which is a satirical news web site. It is often incredibly insightful and laugh out loud funny. It is also not infrequently crude and even disgusting. To be honest, it’s usually one or the other. And as she used my computer to navigate the internet, she said, “Doesn’t this bother you? Do you think this is healthy for this stuff to be in front of you when you turn on the computer?” Um.....I’m guessing the right answer is, “no”?

What would our lives look like if we had those verses in front of us all the time? What if before we opened the magazine or listened to the song or downloaded those images or turned on the television we asked, “is it good? Pure? Honorable? Just? Pleasing? Commendable? Excellent? Praiseworthy?”

And then Paul ups the ante even further, saying, “You know what? Just do what I do. Imitate me, and you’ll get there.”

Is there anyone in this room who feels comfortable saying that today? Want to look like Jesus? Follow me. Live like me. Want to be a Christian? Just do what I do, and you’ll be fine.” Doesn’t that sound corny? Doesn’t that sound presumptuous? But what if we were living that way? What if we had more leaders whose lives were such that we could say, “keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you”? Wouldn’t Crafton Heights be a different kind of place then?!?!

“Oh, I don’t know about that, Pastor Dave,” you might be saying. “If we all walked around trying to be gentle and not worrying and prayerful and humble and servant-like, we’d be a community of wimps. That sounds, well, soft. To be honest, it sounds like Paul expected everyone to be like Mr. Rogers.”

Well, I can see how you might think that, but that’s definitely not what Paul is like! Remember, this is the man who last week called out his opponents as “dogs” and “evil workers” and “mutilators”. This is the man who had sharp disagreements with Barnabas and Peter, a man who stood up to the other apostles when he thought they were wrong and who was so fierce and passionate that he was eventually killed for his beliefs. He may have been a lot of things, but Paul was no wimp.

And being a Christian isn't "wimpy" either. Following Jesus in the way that Paul is talking about simply means that we are not willing to let ourselves be sidetracked by a need to be the funniest guy in the room, we are not willing to hide behind sarcasm, or competitiveness, or impure sexuality, or anything else that dilutes the peace and the power of Jesus Christ.

Paul ends the section that we've read in Philippians today with a personal testimony about the fact that he is able to be content in any and every situation because of the power of Jesus Christ – power that is available to Paul because of his commitment to live in a place where that power is available to him. To live "in Christ." To be a part of a community that is trusting, Christ-centered, service-oriented, and humble. A community that loves each other enough to insist that each member of that community lives that way – even when things get sticky.

That's where Paul lived. That's where Euodia and Syntyche lived. May it be so for us, beloved. May it be so for us. Amen.