

*Philippians 4:10-14 (NRSV)*

<sup>10</sup>I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

*Colossians 3:15-17 (NRSV)*

<sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Anxious?

Are you anxious about the economy? The war? Your job? Your health? Even capital campaigns have been known to make people anxious.

But anxiety has always been part of the human condition. In Paul's day, people were no less anxious and stressed out than we are now. For the ancients, heaven was populated with countless gods and goddesses, any of whom might take a disliking toward you or your neighbors on a whim. The pantheon of the gods was like one big soap opera, far removed from any human control. The gods would do what they wanted, when they wanted. People coped with the whims of the gods in different ways. Some, like the Epicureans, decided that since they couldn't control their capricious gods, they'd simply grab all the pleasure and happiness they could in life. (Sounds like a lot of people I know!) Others, like the Stoics, sought to make themselves immune to anxiety by learning a detached self-sufficiency, which they called "contentment."

In today's passage from his letter to the Christians in Philippi, Paul uses the language of the Stoics. This is the only place in his letters that Paul refers to himself as "content" (*autarkes* in the Greek). Paul would often use the language and vocabulary of his audience when he spoke to them about Jesus Christ. But Paul always meant something different too; there was always a Christian perspective. For the Stoics, contentment was all about being independent, needing no one else. That way, the "content" person couldn't be harmed by the emotions or slights or needs of others. Obviously, Paul means something quite different.

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*God has saved us by calling us to him and forming us into his church. Now, it is time to get on with the work he has given us . . . to just do it!*

For weeks now, we've been talking about the body of Christ, a.k.a., the Church, the church universal, the community of believers, the holy catholic (an old word meaning "universal") church, the people of God. Yet, few topics in our faith are less well-understood or embraced than our proclamation that we are the Church.

It is so tempting to see the Church, including our corner of it called St. Andrew, as a club or as a gathering of the like-minded. But that is not the truth. So, let's go over the basics again.

First, all those who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus have been given new life. We are new creations. We have been born anew. We have died with Christ and been raised with Christ.

Second, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, has formed all the believers into a single, unified body: the church. It is the Spirit who has called us to God. It is the Spirit who has formed us into the body of Christ.

Third, you can think of each local church, like St. Andrew, as a colony of God's new human race, an outpost of new life.

Fourth, as colonists, we have been given work to do by our sovereign Master. We are here for a reason. We have not been saved merely for our own sakes, but for the sake of the whole world. We are to make disciples, do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

Fifth, God does not leave us to pursue this work on our own. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the pages of Scripture to us, who pulls our hearts toward God, and who empowers us to build for God's kingdom.

### *Jesus' body*

So . . . given these five points of classic Christian orthodoxy, the full dimensions of what it means to the body of Christ become clearer. If we are Jesus' body, who are his arms? If we are Jesus' body, who are his feet? If we are Jesus' body, who is his back?

It is we, the church, of course. You and me and all those who confess that Jesus is Lord.

We are the arms of Jesus that hold the hurting. We are the feet of Jesus that deliver the Good News. We are Jesus' back, lifting up the poor and the oppressed. It takes strong arms,

**Anxious?**  
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In v. 10 of today's passage, evidently Paul has received some sort of financial help from the Philippians and he thanks them for it. Perhaps he needed some help with expenses while in prison or perhaps it is financial support that he can use in his work. In any event, as joyful as he is to get the gift, Paul wants the Philippians to understand that his life is no longer driven by whether he happens to have a little at the moment or a lot. Such peace in all circumstances doesn't come naturally. Paul has had to *learn* to be satisfied in whatever circumstances or surroundings he finds himself, including the prison from which he writes this letter to the Philippians.

How has Paul learned this? What is his "secret"? Paul has learned that he can do all things, such as being content in all circumstances, through God. It is God who gives Paul the strength that he needs to be free from worry. Paul's secret is that he has genuinely placed his trust in Jesus rather than in himself. Like a wise sheep (yes, that is an oxymoron . . . but you get my point!), he trusts his Good Shepherd.

He knows that he is God's, as we are God's, and that nothing – "not death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers . . . nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:38-39). Such confidence in God and the strength he provides is the basis for Paul's joyful contentment – and our own.

And it is the basis for our commitment to the joyful and challenging work of building for the kingdom of God.

swift feet, and a sturdy back. By grace, God strengthens us for this work. And in this work there is profound joy, peace, and, as Paul writes, contentment.

*"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"*

I live a very comfortable life. When I get hungry, I eat and I eat well. When I get tired, I lie down on the big sofa or perhaps that recliner in front of the big screen television. It's almost embarrassing. I grumble and sigh over the silliest things. Oh gee . . . the faucet is dripping again . . . the computer isn't running quite as fast as I'd like . . . so silly.

I know that when Paul talks about having learned to be content in all circumstances, his "circumstances" cover ground I've never had to trod. Last summer, I led a group from St. Andrew on a trip to the biblical lands, encompassing Egypt, Israel and much of Paul's travels. One stop was in Antalya, Turkey. It is on the southern coast and was where Paul began his first missionary journey. We, of course, docked there in our luxury cruise ship, disembarked, and got on a bus for a tour. Even from the bus, I was struck by the high mountains and difficult terrain that backed up right to the shore.

Paul landed there in about 48AD and got off a barely seaworthy boat. And he headed northward across that stark terrain – on foot!! If someone told me to start walking across those mountains, I'd judge them to be insane. . . . you see, I live a very comfortable life.

In the midst of hardships I can scarcely imagine, Paul found contentment and peace. No distance, no mountain, no beating, no

shipwreck . . . nothing could deter him from the work that God had given him to do. He would follow the Spirit's direction, going from place to place, founding yet more colonies of God's new human race.

It doesn't make sense to me that God would ask so much from Paul, so much from countless Christians, and yet ask only a little from me. How much sense does it make to have waiting lists for the Children's Weekday Program or for Vacation Bible School. If we need to reconfigure space, let's reconfigure it. If we need to build space, let's build it. If we

are choked by debt, let's get it off our throats. If God wants new churches, new colonies, let's plant them. If we need more volunteers, let's get them . . . on down the line. Just do it.

The remarkable thing, at least to me, is that it is often in the midst of all this doing that I find the God I hardly knew. It is easy to sit back, to wait for some sort of blinding moment or experience before plunging ahead. But this is not the way. It's simply not how God's colonies grow and flourish.

Reading just today's two brief passages from Paul, one can't help but sense a man at deep peace with himself and with God. He knows his purpose. His life has meaning. And all of it is grounded in his love for the God who loves him. He is a grateful man, doing all things in the name of his Lord.

Now, more than two millennia later, I too am beginning to learn what Paul had long since learned . . . that a faithful life is a life committed to just doing it.

Rev. Michael Reeves on "Just Do It!"

We are all aware of the highly successful NIKE logo that says: *Just Do It*. The idea is that it is when we change the momentum we make a difference, that when we get out of our comfort zone, we are most productive and relevant. With regard to the church, many folks who join a large church have the mistaken idea that they can find obscurity because of its size and that they can fade into the sidelines – that the sheer mass of the church will let things happen without my being such an integral part. But in the last few weeks we have addressed the idea of being United and being Unlimited. The concepts are related.

We have unlimited opportunities but unless you do your part we are not united, we are diminished. So, today is the day to "just do it." We have a couple of strong encouragements in the verses for the day.

In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, Paul is thanking them for a gift. They were very generous in their support for Paul's ministry despite their economic limits. They were known for the generosity despite their lack of wealth. So in a positive letter that focuses on joy, Paul exhorts the members at Philippi that they should have the attitude that: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." That is a clear statement of being unlimited.

Then in his letter to the church leaders at Colossae, Paul says: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ..." Is that your own focus?

In his book, *Five Fruitful Practices of Healthy Congregations*, Bishop Robert Schnase suggests that excellence in ministry is something perceptible and palpable. It's not only seen in the three B's – bodies, budgets, and buildings, but also the number of people:

- whose lives are shaped by worship
- whose hearts are changed by Bible study
- whose community life is rich in Christ
- and by the number and quality of mission trips and outreach projects.

This capital campaign is an opportunity:

- for you to do something really excellent,
- for you to grow as a disciple,
- to be united with others to do something that is extraordinary.

When you come forward to participate in Communion, bring your commitment card and become a part of the journey. And if you do not feel you can make a commitment, please bring a one-time gift.

**Just Do It!**

**READING WITH HEART & MIND, MAY 4 – MAY 10**

Each of these passages speaks to our life in the church.

**Monday, Acts 6:1-7** The church makes disciples.

**Tuesday, Hebrews 3:13; Colossians 4:8** The church is to be a place of encouragement.

**Wednesday, 1 John 1:3-7** Fellowship in the church

**Thursday, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15** Giving in the church

**Friday, Ephesians 6:18-19** The church prays

**Saturday, Psalm 100:1-4** The church worships

## Sermon Notes

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### ***Get the Monkey Off Your Back:***

#### ***Making Sense of Creation and Evolution***

#### **The current *Something Else* series on Sunday mornings**

The debate around issues of creation and evolution isn't going away. Instead, it seems to get more and more heated, with a lot more talk than understanding. In this series, we'll try to make sense of the debate and see that Christian truth claims are not at odds with scientific claims.

**Taught by Scott Engle at 11:00 in Festival Hall on Sunday morning.**

Today: NO CLASS Next Week: Understanding Intelligent Design

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. I remember passing a church that had one of those signs out front announcing the next Sunday's sermon. It read "We grow or we decay." That is so true; nothing ever stays the same. This is true for people, relationships, and even organizations. Every business knows that it can't sit on the status quo. It is impossible to hold a business in one place. It either grows or it decays. The same is true for churches. Those that stop growing begin that long sad journey of decline. Growth brings vitality and excitement . . . and vice versa.  
  
St. Andrew has always been and remains committed to being one of God's thriving colonies. This capital campaign is about pressing ahead to do the work that God has given us – to just do it. Yet, we can sometimes focus on the obstacles in our path. Make a list of five such obstacles that people might think they face in this campaign. Perhaps it is anxiety about the economy. Perhaps it is fear that St. Andrew will change. Look over the list and talk about how each such obstacle can be overcome. How can we press ahead even in times of uncertainty? Are there ever times free of uncertainties? How can we, by the grace of God, keep growing this church and still preserve that which makes this place and these people so special? You might put all this in the context of Paul's own work. He was not as different from us as we often imagine.
2. Why is it so hard for us to shed worry and anxiety? You'd think we get enough practice at dealing with it. What makes us cling to our worries if they are precious possessions? Make a list of reasons! What can we do to learn (truly learn and apply!) what Paul learned about relying upon God's strength and care? How can we help each other in this? How do we truly become content and joyful in all circumstances, knowing that God's riches are all we really need? Do we even really believe that God's riches are all we need?