



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

November 26, 2009

Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:10-20

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100

Gospel: Luke 17:11-19

### **Paul rejoices in the Lord for the Philippians**

Have you ever watched or listened to any motivational speakers? Maybe you had to do it at work or have seen them on TV or read some of their books. Some of them I found interesting and insightful; others I think just kept a notebook of every cliché they ever heard in their whole life and just strung them together for a half hour and collected a paycheck. That's the impression I got. Some of the stuff they say is just kind of goofy and strange. They say all kinds of things that make you shake your head and say, "This guy isn't real believable."

I have to believe that someone without the Spirit of God living in their hearts would think the same thing about what I just read to you from Paul's letter to the Philippians. "I know the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether in plenty or in want, whether hungry or well fed;" yeah, right. You hear that kind of talk and you kind of think, "When is the pitch coming for how many monthly payments it is going to take me to get this secret?" It sounds too good to be true. It sounds like its just pie in the sky, by and by and this is a guy that probably should be avoided. That's what a person without the Spirit, I'm sure, would think.

You and I, as we gather together on this day, this day where our nation stops to, nowadays we stop to be thankful. We don't really "give" thanks because we can't really "give thanks" to someone publicly in society because then we get in trouble. So we just talk about what we are thankful for without saying who we are thanking. As we pause on this day, we who know who to give thanks to know that Paul isn't pie in the sky, by and by. We know that the Holy Spirit led him to write these words because he knew that we would need to hear them. He knew that we would need encouragement to live them. He knew that we would need a kick in the seat of the pants to focus on the secret that Paul is talking about; the secret that he explains, and the secret that we see the Philippians putting into practice in their lives as we read these words.

So this morning, let's focus on that secret, to being content, to being thankful, being satisfied, whether well fed or hungry, whether in plenty or in want. It's a secret that you and I need because we live in a world that's not perfect. It's a world that is affected by sin. And there are plenty of times that you and I during our lifetimes will go through each side of the spectrum, good things, good times, bad things, and bad times. They will all be a part of our life on this side of heaven. So when Paul tells us the secret is "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength," there's a part of us, as

believers, that just says, “You bet! That’s the one thing that gets me through all the bad times. Knowing that I have a God that loved me enough to stretch out his arms and let him be nailed to a cross simply because he loves me and he wants me to be with him forever.” That is a part of us that embraces this secret, rejoices in this secret and wants to grow to know the one who gives us strength more and more, day after day.

But on this side of heaven, there is also a part of us that every Thanksgiving has to feel a little bit ashamed, isn’t there? A little bit of guilt as we stop and give thanks only one day in the year when really we’ve been called to live an entire life of thanksgiving to God who has loved us so fully. As we stop and say what we are thankful for, we are also reminded that there are plenty of times when we are just not that thankful. Maybe you have the tradition of going around the table and saying what you are thankful for or something like that on this day, sometimes we mouth some wonderful words, don’t we? But we are kind of like that kid that just has to say thank you for the gift that they got that they didn’t want because it doesn’t have batteries and it’s not plastic and it won’t break in the next 10 minutes. They are upset about it, but they have to say thank you anyhow. Sometimes that’s how we are.

Think about it; ever bow your head, fold your hands and thank God for the food you are about to eat and then take the first bite and say, “This is cold. This is too hot. This doesn’t have enough salt. This is this... This is that...” We’ve just thanked God for this bounteous feast and then the next things out of our mouth, besides the food that’s flying out as we are chewing, is complaining about the food we are eating. Do you ever do that? Do you ever spend any time on a day like today saying, “Lord, we thank you for the many blessings you’ve showered upon us throughout the year” and then spend 364 other days of the year complaining about how things are going? The economy’s not good. My checkbook balance isn’t good. Think of how often we spend doing the exact opposite of the words that we mouth on this day. Do you ever stop and think that maybe people of this area are called “Cheese Heads” because it goes so well with the “whine” that comes out of their mouth?

There is a part of us, the sinful nature that is not thankful for the blessings we get. The sinful nature in us can only see the things we don’t have; the blessings we want that God has not seen fit in his wisdom and his love and his mercy to give to us. The sinful nature often gets the upper hand and leads us to mouth words of thanksgiving while our hearts are far from being content or being thankful or praising God.

So on this day, as we stop and we give thanks, I’d encourage you to also give thanks that God still loves you, even in spite of the fact that you’ll probably complain about something the rest of this day. Even if it’s the quality of the football you have to watch on TV; you’ll complain about something. Be thankful that God still forgives you. Christ lived and died for you even though he knew you were going to complain and not be thankful and maybe just go through the motions and not love him with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. Yet, he still went through it all. He still went through the agony of hell. He still lived perfectly in your place because he loves you with an everlasting love that is not dependant on how much you love him.

So when we get that kick in the seat of our pants and we are reminded that the secret to being content in every situation is focusing on God, not on ourselves, and focus on the blessings he has given us and not the ones that we think we should have received that he hasn't seen fit to give us, then we find the strength to be content because we can put our trust in the one whose love is absolutely amazing, absolutely certain and absolutely the most powerful thing you will ever, ever encounter in this world or in the next. God's love for you is the most powerful thing and it's something you can give thanks to him for every day of your life; even after you, being weighed down with guilt and shame, say "Lord, forgive me for not being as thankful as I should be." You can still give thanks because you know that he has forgiven you in Christ.

That's the greatest blessing he has given us. It isn't our health and our wealth even though those can be wonderful blessings from him. It isn't our family and the health of our family. It's the love he has given us in Christ. I'm not saying these other things aren't blessings, but the one certain blessing that is never here and then gone is his love for us in Christ. So cling to that and focus on that and you'll find the strength to say, "The year has been good. The year has been bad. Whichever it was physically, spiritually it was wonderful because my God loves me and he forgives me."

Then that moves us. It changes us. It strengthens us to do the things that Paul is thanking the Philippians for. Paul is in prison when he is writing this. The Philippians were a little ways away from him. He writes to them and this letter goes to them to thank them, part of it that they had sent Epaphroditus to him to give him supplies and things he needed while he was in prison. It wasn't like they hopped a bus, a plane or a train. It wasn't like they dealt with baggage fees they thought were outrageous. They probably had to walk across a continent, get on a boat and then go someplace else. Then walk along another continent until they finally brought him these gifts. That's what Epaphroditus had to do. So this strength that God gives is pretty doggone powerful.

Look what it moved them to do for Paul. He says, "This doesn't surprise me. From the first time you've heard the gospel, the gospel touched your heart and it changed you. When you knew that Jesus loved you and died for your sins, when you know heaven is open to you, it changed you Philippians right away because no one else shared with me in giving and receiving, but you guys did it even when I was in Thessalonica down the road. You did it."

They didn't just go about being thankful. They did thanksgiving. They put it into action. They reached out to Paul, the one who had brought them the gospel, the one whom they loved because he shared the gospel with them and brought him this help when he needed it, when he was in prison. Think of the encouragement it brought him to continue to faithfully proclaim the gospel because he could see the power of the gospel in the life of the Philippians.

Sometimes the greatest blessing God gives us that we can be thankful for would be fellow Christians who comfort us and encourage us and strengthen us and at times

even rebuke and admonish us when we need it so that we walk closer to our God. Be thankful that God has not made you an island. He's put you together, here in this congregation, with other believers who can comfort and encourage you when things aren't going well. Because on this side of heaven, there will be times when things aren't going well. Be thankful even if they don't know what to say and even if they don't say exactly the right thing. Sometimes we all get tongue-tied and it doesn't come out the way we want, but when they are trying to comfort you or console you or encourage you, be thankful that at least they tried, even if it wasn't perfect. They are responding to God's love for them in Christ and they are trying to point you to God's love in Christ. When we are at our best, that's what we are doing. We aren't just saying "Hang in there. Things will get better." We are saying, "God loves you. That doesn't change. God is with you. That will never change. God will enable you to get through more and do more than you think you can do." As long as we keep pointing each other to the secret, the one who gives us strength, the one through whom we can do everything, God will bless us. God will strengthen us. And that will always be something that we can be thankful for. No matter what the economic indicators say, we can give thanks to God our Father and to him be glory forever and ever.