

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
February 6, 2011**

Philippians 4:10-13

Do You Know the Secret of being Content?

- 1. The search*
- 2. The discovery*
- 3. The results*

**Hymns: 463 – 369 –
Distribution: 158, 391 – 367**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV, ©1984

Philippians 4:10-13 –

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been 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 everything through him who gives me strength.

An airline pilot had a strange habit. Whenever he took off from his hometown, he would ask the copilot to take the controls. Then he would stare out the cockpit window for a time until he turned back to his work. One day the copilot's curiosity got the best of him. He asked, "What do you always look at down there?"

"See that boy fishing on the bridge down there?" the pilot replied. "I used to fish from that same bridge when I was a kid. Whenever a plane flew over, I would watch it until it disappeared and wish that I could be a pilot." With a sigh he added, "Now that I'm a pilot, I wish that I could be back down there fishing."

I think we can relate! It seems that this man hadn't learned the secret. Have you learned the secret? The secret is how to be content in life. **As we worship our Lord in these Sundays using the theme "Love Takes Time," today we learn from God's Word that we spend our time in contentment. Do you know the secret of being content? Today let's consider:**

- 1. The search**
- 2. The discovery**
- 3. The results**

1 – We read in Philippians 4: "*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been 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 everything through him who gives me strength.*"

It would be good to know the context of these words. Paul wrote these wonderful words of contentment from prison in Rome! As with my last sermon, he was awaiting his trial in Caesar's court. The Philippians had sent him a gift, as the rest of our second lesson recounted. Paul took this opportunity to follow through on the lost art of sending a "thank you" and to comment on his content situation.

The word that Paul uses for "content" is quite interesting. It's a word that was used by Greek philosophers in Paul's day. It was a goal that they held as the optimum situation for a person. It is the word AUTARKES. This Greek word means:

1. Sufficient for one's self, strong enough or processing enough to need no aid or support.
2. Independent of external circumstances
3. Contented with one's lot, with one's means, though the slenderest

The ideal state of life that Greek philosophy strove for was one of being strong enough and independent enough to not have to rely on anyone. However, Paul puts a new meaning on this Greek word as he reflects on what brings true contentment, which he knew folks in the Greek world wanted to find.

What about the search for contentment today? I think we'd all agree that this is something that everyone is searching for! The Greek idea of self-sufficiency sounds like the ancient version of the American dream. In fact, do you remember how the Declaration of Independence puts it? **"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness."** Our forefathers thought enough of the pursuit of contentment to put it into the basic rights that every person should have in our country.

However, in our country people look for contentment from many different sources. Unfortunately, many of them are false sources. People say things like, "I'll be content when...":

- I have enough money
- I find true love
- I get my degree
- I finish this current project at work
- I change jobs
- We get a new _____. (Fill it in!)
- We move
- I'm healthy
- I have more friends
- I know I'm safe and secure

It's interesting that the chase after something new seems to be what people think they need to be content. It's also interesting that in times of prosperity, discontent is easily bred because of what everyone else has!

Some of those things I mentioned aren't wrong to strive for, but the question is whether they will give ultimate contentment. The Word of God before us today tells us that the things of the world will not bring true contentment. In

fact, they will bring false results to a person. What are these?

Short term = Frustration
Long hours on the job
Fatigue
Disappointment
The "rushed" feeling

Long term = Burnout
Nervous breakdown
Divorce
Depression

THE WORLD'S CONTENTMENT IS UNRELIABLE!

2 – It's clear that we need help finding it. Paul wrote, *"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."* What is Paul's secret? It's interesting that these Bible verses do use the word "secret," another interesting Greek word. Literally, the phrase here means Paul has "been initiated."

Were you ever initiated? Often we speak of being initiated into a school or a club. Initiation usually means that you didn't really know all the ins and outs or the secrets of the club. You didn't even really know what was happening in the initiating process, but you were led through it by someone else. This is true with learning about contentment. Paul admits that God had to reveal the secret to him. This is where Greek philosophy and theology will part ways. What had God taught him about contentment that we need to know also?

We don't find all the "secrets" in these verses, but other parts of Scripture clue us in:

- Paul writes earlier in this same book: *"I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."* (Php. 3:8,9)

- In the book of Hebrews we read, “*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’*” (13:5)

This clues us in to the first part of contentment: **SPIRITUAL CONTENTMENT**. To be spiritually content means that we realize:

- 1) That **God the Father loved us** with an everlasting love and could not bear to see us condemned to hell forever because of our sins. Therefore he devised a plan to save us.
- 2) That **Jesus Christ, his Son, came to earth** in fulfillment of that plan as our Savior and died on the cross and rose again to win our salvation.
- 3) That the **Holy Spirit came into our hearts through baptism and conversion and changed our heart of stone to a heart of faith. He now lives in our hearts and will guide us safely to heaven through faith in Jesus.**

If you know and believe these important facts, you can have spiritual contentment!

There’s a football game that is scheduled for later today. Some of you are probably very aware that the Super Bowl will be played this afternoon. Have you ever watched your favorite team play a game on tape when you already knew the outcome? Most people don’t like to hear the final score in that situation, but perhaps someone spilled the beans yet you decided to watch the tape anyway. Are you going to be anxious when an interception is thrown? Or when the other team surges into the lead? I don’t think so. You already know the outcome. Imagine you watch it with a friend who didn’t know the outcome and doesn’t know you do, and he’s going crazy about the game and also wondering why you’re so calm! In the same way, we can know spiritual contentment because we know the war has been won. Our place in

heaven is secure, and this outshines any material possessions we could ever acquire!

Then follows the secret of **PHYSICAL CONTENTMENT**. In the verses we read from our text, it doesn’t seem as though Paul had a problem with the physical things in his life! The secret of physical contentment is that “things” are really “gifts” – all of them! All things are gifts from our heavenly Father for us to use wisely in this life. They are not things that we deserve or should have coming, but are purely from his love. When we make a list of the physical things we have received (even if you don’t consider yourself “wealthy”), we are amazed!

Martin Luther, in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles Creed said, “**I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle and all that I own, and all that I need to keep my body and life.**” God is indeed gracious!

This changes our thinking from “I’m missing out” to “I have it all!”, knowing we have undeserved physical blessings and remembering that ultimately we do have it all in the life to come in heaven! This changes our attitude to one that asks, “What has he not given me that I need?” We realize that the only time we have a problem in this area comes when we look around at others. **May God help us to remember these secrets!**

3 – But we can’t quite stop there today. Paul tells us about one more thing with the secret of contentment. We also see that the contentment God gives us produces wonderful results in our lives. The first result we see here in the reaction of Paul. Paul wrote, “*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.*” Later on he mentions that he received had received the gift they sent and rejoiced that they sent it. Contentment led Paul to have a life and attitude of joy and praise, even over a gift sent from far away! **Contentment will lead us into a life of joy and praise also.** It will lead us from a

life of frustration and complaint to one of rejoicing. And then we can offer ourselves and all we have to offer to our good Lord to use as he will.

A second result is found in a verse we read that you may have learned: *“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”* Paul knew that since he was saved and preserved by a more powerful individual - God himself - he had a power that he was tapped into, which helped him in everything.

Was there ever a time when you were a little child that you “helped” your dad carry something? Perhaps you were a three-year-old and saw him getting ready to pick up the vacuum cleaner to take it upstairs and you said, “Let me help!” And although he could have done it himself, he moved over so you could grab a little piece of it and “help” carry it. But now you realize that the power helping you was doing the work. Paul tapped into a greater power for all he did. We also have this power that can pull us through and strengthen us! **We realize that we are not left to fend for ourselves in life, but that the Lord will be our Strength and eventually bring us to heaven one day.**

Thirdly, Paul here expressed his conviction that it didn’t matter if he had a little or a lot, or if he was hungry or full. His contentment would rise about those circumstances and always remain the same. If you ever read the life of Paul in the book of Acts, you’ll realize that he had a great deal to rise above: rejection and mistreatment by enemies; physical problems with a “thorn in the flesh.” But he could rise above all these with his true contentment. **We also have the same contentment that will help us rise above circumstances around us:**

- **Rejection**
- **Robbery**
- **Bankruptcy**
- **Illness**

One other result of Paul’s true contentment we can see in the last book he

wrote, 2 Timothy: *“I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (1:12).* Paul was near the time of his death, and yet he expresses a peace of mind and a confidence that the Lord will not let him down. **This is peace of mind that you and I can have every day,** peace that someone else is running the show and will work for our good. Peace that he will bring us safely to heaven.

Do you know the secret? **Now you do, for the Apostle Paul has clued us in today, through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

- 1. Contentment is not found in the things of this world**
- 2. It only comes from God, who gives us spiritual and physical contentment!**
- 3. Our gracious God also effects wonderful results in our lives from his contentment.**

May we know this contentment! May we spend our days in it. May we treasure it, live it, and share it! Amen.