

December 13, 2020

Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This has been almost too tough a year for us to listen to Paul's words: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." What is there to "rejoice" about, when we feel we are sitting in deep darkness.

Then there is the little problem with his next words: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone." On any given day, for more hours than I care to admit, gentleness would not describe my state of mind. Anger, harsh words, and harsh thoughts can dominate my thinking, especially around politics and the pandemic.

In those moments it is more important than ever to hold on to Paul's next words: "The Lord is near." God is present, all the time, everywhere. This mantra does help to calm me, most times. But then Paul says, "Do not worry about anything." Really?

I remind myself of these words at two in the morning, when I am lying awake and worrying; worrying about unfinished projects, my family, the state of the world. Paul's words do not offer an end to my worrying.

It does bring me to the rest of Paul's sentence though: "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." I do offer "prayers and supplications ... to God". But, but, upon reflection, what is often missing from my cry for rescue is "with thanksgiving".

"Help! And, by the way, thanks?!"

It all seems so impossible, when the darkness seems so dark. What are we supposed to do?

I would like to suggest that you hold on to the words and the people you have just been listening too. Focus on the nativity and our faith community.

Think about the shepherds, the ones on the bottom of a society where everyone is pushed down by Rome. Yet the shepherds are witnesses of a lowly birth with promises of greatness. And, with joy, they persevered.

Think about the magi and their arduous journey. Months of travel into the unknown; in the dark, because otherwise they would be unable to see the light. Still, they moved forward.

Think about what giving birth in a stable might have been like. Yet we are told, Mary gave thanks.

Meditating on the nativity helps us to see that it is in dark times that we, in our vulnerability, open ourselves to God's presence. We can experience God's presence in and through our faith family; in and through those very people you just delighted in seeing as they read. This presence offers us hope; offers us "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"; offers us true joy.

In these days, then, sit with the nativity, when you find yourself in deep darkness. Open yourself to God's presence and share your pains and fears in prayer and supplication, but do so with thanksgiving. You see, one of the ways to bring light to darkness is gratitude. And our faith family give us much to be grateful for.

On this Third Sunday of Advent, as we bask in the light of Joy, focus with gratitude on the nativity, on our Amicable faith family, and on Paul's words: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice". Amen.