

**+ Philippians 4:10-20 + Rejoice that You Serve the Lord! +
+ 14th Sunday after Pentecost + 21 August 2016 +**

"I got to help today!" A little child excitedly tells his mom what he got to do. He got to help with a project. He didn't get hurt. He didn't get in trouble. He did what he was told to do, and everyone even told him that he was such a big boy helping out with the grown-ups. The child eagerly tells his mom what he got to do because he got to help and helping is a good thing!

"I don't want to do it! Why do I have to do it? Why don't you do it? Do you think I'm your servant?" As they get older, kids often tend to think that helping around the house isn't such a great thing. Mom and dad give them more responsibilities, yet those jobs aren't as fun as helping out when they were little. Back then it was more like a game, getting to help the grown-ups with grown-up work, but when helping becomes a responsibility, then the complaining starts or at least the heavy sighing.

So what happens when we get to be adults? Do you learn to stop complaining? Do you get excited like you were when you were little because you got to help finish a job? Sadly the answer to both questions is no. As we get older, we don't learn to stop complaining. Our complaining gets sharper and more refined. Getting excited because you got to help finish a job? That doesn't come as easily as it used to when we were kids or at least such joy and satisfaction in serving don't usually last very long.

Yet this morning, the Apostle Paul encourages you and me to **REJOICE THAT YOU SERVE THE LORD!** Now this summer we've taken a look at a number of different reasons God gives us to rejoice, some more obvious than others, but rejoice because I get to serve the Lord? Do I really have to do that? How can I rejoice because I get to do something that isn't easy?

Well, if anyone had a reason for complaining about serving the Lord, Paul could have made a case for himself. He could've easily been frustrated when life didn't go his way—and often it didn't. In fact, life often seemed to be against him. As we've heard these past few weeks, he wrote this letter while under house arrest. He had suffered beatings, starvation, shipwreck, and rejection. His life had gone from growing up in a privileged family to one of wondering where he'd find his next meal. Plus few of his hearers returned the favor. Paul wrote, ***"As you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel... not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only."***

Humanly speaking, Paul could've complained, but that's not what he does. ***"I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me."*** When the Philippian Christians found out that Paul was in Rome under house arrest, they sent gifts with one of their own leaders to help him during his imprisonment. So Paul rejoiced!

...But was Paul simply happy to get some help or did his joy come from somewhere else? He goes on. ***"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."*** Yes, Paul rejoiced in their support, but his joy went deeper than that. Instead of grumbling or complaining, Paul was actually content to serve the Lord no matter the situation! How is that possible?

Paul could joyfully serve the Lord with a contented heart because God had given him real contentment. It starts with knowing how unconditional love first moved Jesus to take care of our biggest need by becoming a servant to pay for our sins. That understanding then moves us to serve. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:(14-15), ***"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."***

Then look at the gifts God bestows on you daily. In the Apostles' Creed, we confess, ***"I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth."*** Martin Luther explains that statement, ***"And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life."*** (*Small Catechism*) Everything in this world belongs to God. True contentment means knowing God can and will take care of your every need because everything is already his.

Knowing how much God loves you and how much care and blessing he pours out on you will lead you to rejoice that you can serve the Lord, but how quickly we forget that God provides for our every need! He blesses you with grace upon grace, but how quickly you and I complain! Think of the ancient Israelites who would complain against God at the sight of a dry rock. "Why did you bring us out into this barren land to die?"

We should've stayed in Egypt." "Why did God put Moses over us?" and on and on. How often don't we ourselves do the same? How often have you or I looked at a full closet and said, "I have nothing to wear" or a full fridge and said, "There's nothing to eat"? Yet amazingly God still pours out his blessings in undeserved love, even giving us strength to serve him no matter the situation.

When you look back on Paul's life and all the challenges and hardships he faced for the sake of Christ, you have to wonder how he had the strength to endure all that and to keep serving. He wasn't strong because he believed in Jesus. He wasn't some super-Christian who claimed that because he believed in Jesus he could accomplish anything. No, Paul had strength no matter the situation or how much it changed because he had a Savior-God who never changed. Strengthened by God's love, Paul kept serving his Lord, and he rejoiced to be able to serve the Lord, but it wasn't just Paul.

You see, the Christians living in Philippi had developed a similar reputation. They had developed a reputation of being generous and eager to serve. You see, when Paul and his colleague Silas first brought the Gospel—the good news of Jesus—to Philippi, very few people knew anything about the true God. So Paul and Silas shared the good news of Jesus and the Lord blessed their work, but when Paul cast a demon out of a young slave-girl, her masters had the two men thrown into jail. Miraculously the Lord rescued Paul and Silas and even brought the jailer and his family into God's family through hearing the Word of God and Holy Baptism, but Paul wasn't able to stay. He had to move on and continue his journey of taking the Gospel to other cities, but the Gospel left behind a lasting impact.

The good news of Jesus had changed their focus. Rather than always looking to help themselves, the Philippian Christians began looking for ways to serve their Lord and help others. You see it already in the hospitality of a believer named Lydia who provided lodging and support for Paul and Silas so they could share the Gospel full-time in Philippi with no need for outside income. You see it in how the jailer and his family cared for Paul and Silas after the Lord had rescued those men from prison.

After Paul left, you see it there too. Paul wrote, ***"As you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need."*** Paul had planted congregations all over Greece and Turkey, but none of those congregations provided support for his ongoing mission work except for the Philippians. In spite of their meager wealth, they supported his work wherever he went. When Paul was later imprisoned in Rome, they sent one of their leaders, Epaphroditus, with gifts to support Paul. Paul could only give thanks for that eager desire to help and to serve their Lord. He wrote, ***"The gifts you sent...are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."*** God's people rejoiced to serve their Lord.

What about you? How has the Gospel left a lasting impact on your life? How has the good news of Jesus changed how you look at life, at serving not yourself, but the Lord? Do you realize that it is a privilege to serve the Lord? Not just follow him, but to live for him, to work for him, to direct all that you do in each calling God has given you to serve him. Paul explains in Romans 12:(1) how the Gospel changes how we view serving the Lord. ***"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."*** Your life becomes a daily living sacrifice to our God who is compassionate and merciful and gracious day after day.

So how is your life ***"a fragrant offering"*** to the Lord? How can you be like those Philippian Christians looking for opportunities to help others and to generously serve your Lord? God has given you abilities and talents and interests and life experience which you can put to use in the different callings God has given you so you can be a blessing to others at church, at home, and in society. You have time that can be devoted to your Lord in service to him and for the spread of his kingdom. You can share the Gospel with others—family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates—and can help us to do so. You have treasures—many or few—that you can generously use in support of Gospel ministry here in Central New York, across North America, and around the world helping others take the good news of Jesus where you cannot go.

Rejoice that you get to serve the Lord! We don't serve our Lord grudgingly like children who don't want to do their chores or lazily doing the bare minimum. We need not complain about serving our Lord or wring our hands because others are not doing all the work we expect them to do. No, we rejoice that we get to serve the Lord, who gave everything for us. Like Paul, we rejoice greatly because God has poured out ***"his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"*** on our lives. So you and I eagerly and excitedly look for ways to serve our Lord

confident that our God, who has provided all things for us in the past, will meet all our needs with his glorious grace as we serve him. So dear servants of the Lord, rejoice in the Lord always! Amen.