

**November 22, 2015 Year B Reign of Christ**

**Scriptures Lesson**

*Psalm 93*

*Philippians 4:4-13*

*Matthew 6:25-33*

**Sermon**      *The Secret to Being Content*

Frank was a very old man now; once he had been young; once he had been strong; once he had been an extremely hard worker. He had earned a good living for his wife and ten children. Frank's wife had died some years before so Frank had been left with the seemingly impossible task of raising those ten children all by himself. He loved the children very much. He bought them whatever he could to meet their needs and gave them as much support as he possibly could in their school and their extracurricular activities. The children felt their Dad had done OK, and even Jim who was an adopted child, the only child not born to Frank and his wife, felt the same presence. He felt that he had had the same care from his Dad.

Now years before Frank retirement, he had promised all the children a thousand dollars each on the day of his death. And at the time he had made the promise, he had more than enough money to give to each one of the children. But in recent years between the shrinking value of his pension and the rising cost of every other thing in the world, including recent hospital bills, Frank just did not have the money on hand to keep his word to all of his children. So when Frank sensed his death was near, he gathered his children around his bed and one by one they stepped forward. First they hugged Frank and kissed him and then they received their one thousand dollars. After the nine of the children had come forward, the adopted son Jim came forward to get his fair share. He hugged his father and kissed him but strangely Dad asked the other children to leave the room. "Son", said Frank to Jim in a strange voice, "I don't have good news for you." So I was able to each of your brothers and sisters a thousand dollars and now I only have two hundred dollars to give to you." Jim was shocked by the news and he cried Father, "If you knew this, why didn't you make an adjustment in the amount so that we could all have the same amount to get a fair share?" "Son" replied Frank, "It is better that I keep my word to as many as possible. Although I cannot give you as much money as I had promised originally, I can give you something that is of much more value because to you I offer you my closest friend and his friendship is worth far more than all that I could ever send your way." So treat my friend with kindness." On that word, Frank breathed his last and died.

When the funeral was over the other nine children were very excited about their sudden wealth but Jim, his adopted was not. Jim stayed home and after he paid off

a couple of small debts, his money was gone. He pouted for a long time about his Dad's distribution of the money in the estate and then he thought about his Dad's last request, to treat his closest friend with kindness. Two days later he decided to begin to fulfill the request by spending the last few dollars of his inheritance on inviting Dad's friend out to dinner. And we will leave the story for a little bit.

The apostle Paul at the time of his writing of the letter to the Philippians was most likely a prisoner in Rome. The church asked Philippi to send him a gift carried by a person named Epaphroditus who was charged in assisting Paul in any way that he could. Paul was most appreciative of the gift and writes to express his gratitude and generosity shown by the Philippians. In fact this whole letter to the Philippians is an expression Paul's great gratitude for the love that that church had showed him. Strangely enough Paul is, also, so positive about his situation. After everything that he had been through in his life, heat, hunger, cold, thirst, danger from the elements, betrayal by fair-weather friends, stoning, lashings; you can read about it in his letters and in the book of Acts. Imprisonment, shipwreck set adrift at sea and after all these things Paul does not complain of his situation. "Not that I complain because of want." Paul said, "I have learned that in whatever state I am, to be content." Wow! Is there anything harder to learn? We are never really content in life with who we are or what we have. There is always a desire to have more or less than another—more money—a lot less work—more recognition —more focus on me --- lot less responsibility—a lot of victories and no defeats lots of food but no weight gain in the process. If you are going to school you want lots of A's but not a lot of homework, more gain -less pain, we never seem to satisfied, do we? So we can learn from a person who did learn to be content. Paul says I know how to be abase, I know how to abound in any and all circumstances I learned the secret of facing plenty and hungry, abundance and want. Of course this is not to say that Paul went around looking for hunger, pain, and imprisonment although as we read some of his stories, you wonder sometimes and yet in the midst of all these dire situations, he learned that somehow to be content. Paul learned this secret for contentment for God's people that it comes from a relationship with Jesus. I can do all things in the one who strengthen me Paul says, "I can do all things" or maybe a better way for us to understand it, I have the strength to do all things. Paul's strength comes from Jesus and Paul has learned to be present, that whatever situation he finds himself present in love, care, and support, and wisdom in whatever way is needed at that particular time.

You know today we prepare to celebrate our hearts and minds for that very special, Thanksgiving Holiday. And most or if not all of us have much for which be thankful for as we gather to praise and thank God for goodness, God's graciousness and thank God for the gifts that God has given to us, and the bounty of this good earth on which we live. We might not always believe that we receive

bounty from God and to be honest there may be times we haven't received everything that we think we needed let alone what we wanted. Whether the gift of God be a great gift or a small gift we have the assurance of God's presence with us, just as God was present with St. Paul. God promises to be with each one of us, come what may be in life and that is why the same God, the God of Jesus calls each of us in the midst of our bountiful blessings to in return to, share that word we learned in preschool or that word we learned in kindergarten, share. Share our tithe, share our hearts, share our material possessions to care for and to improve the lot of the homeless, the hungry the jobless, the abused those who are discriminated against and yes even refugees of which our lord, Jesus himself was one.

What about our friend Jim what was going to happen to him? Our friend Jim, Frank's son in the story I told earlier. When the meal was over Frank's closest friend leaned over said to Jim, "You know you are the only one of Frank's children that treated me with any kind of kindness; I want to return affection to you. So the next morning he sent over a couple of head of cattle and purse of money for Jim. Later a couple more head and a purse of money and soon Jim had a large herd of cattle. It wasn't long before he had greater wealth than any of the children in the family.

Elie Wiesel, you know the name, Holocausts survivor, great writer of devotional literature that is his story. Noted Jewish author, winner of the Noble Peace Prize, writes in conclusion of his story. "A good story is not necessarily about miracles; a good story is about friendship and it is about hope which is the greatest miracle of all. Amen