

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Faith Evangelical Lutheran Church
Jackson, MI 10-16-2011
Rev. Ross Mahan, Pastor
Phil. 4:10-13; I Sam 2:1-10; Eph. 4:1-6
Lu. 14:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Savior

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

1. Over the past few weeks we have been watching the protests taking place on Wall Street and perhaps you've wondered what it is all about. I'm not sure the protestors could really answer that question but one thing comes through loud and clear, these young people are very angry and discontented with our nation and with their own lives. What is the cause of their discontent? For half a century our nation has allowed people to vote money from the treasury for themselves and today more and more people actually think the tax payers owe them a living. I thought my generation was bad but this current generation is the worst yet. Forbes magazine sent one of its reporters to Wall Street to interview some of the protestors. Here are some of the results. 93% of the protestors interviewed said that student loans should be forgiven. 98% believe health care should be free. 88% believe the salaries of corporate CEO's should be limited by the government; 93% believe that cell phones and internet access are a right and government should provide it for everyone without cost; I think you get the gist of their thinking. The attitude and behavior of these protestors reveal the total absence of the Christian faith in their hearts. They have been taught in public schools and the university that it's the government's job to make everyone equal but that is impossible. If there is one thing history reveals it is that forcing equality upon a nation leads to tyranny, gulags, and mass murder. .
2. What does the Bible teach? It commands us to work for a living and trust in the sovereign God who blesses us with wealth. God determines what a man will possess in this life and the child of God is thankful for everything God gives him; everything we have comes from a gracious and wise God. We saw this illustrated in our Old Testament lesson. Hannah had prayed for a son and the Lord gave her Samuel and in her prayer of thanks we read: *The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. (I Sam. 2:6-9)*. Man by nature is never content. *The eyes of man are never satisfied (Eccl. 1:8)*. Sin causes us to grumble, worry, complain, and feel sorry for ourselves. We think: *If only I had this I would be happy!* But material riches alone cannot make us happy. True joy, peace, and contentment are the fruits of communion with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The unbeliever is really angry with God and blames him for his circumstances. Let's examine the grace of Christian contentment.
 - I.
3. *What is the meaning of Christian contentment?* Christian Contentment, as one Puritan writer once wrote, is a rare jewel. Even many professing Christians complain and gripe about their lot in life.

Contentment does NOT mean that we never suffer; Christians suffer the same trials and afflictions as the world. It doesn't mean we must learn to be a stoic and suppress all feelings of joy or suffering. Contentment also doesn't mean that we can't tell God what we want or pour out our complaints to Him. Contentment is not inconsistent with a person striving to get ahead in life. When a man is content to stay in poverty when God has given him the opportunity to work and get ahead, such contentment is false. Contentment is a quiet and gracious spirit that learns to submit to God's providence it is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and a divine grace the Christian gains through experience. Contentment must be learned. Paul wrote in our text: *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* Contentment accepts what God allows into our lives with the attitude of our Savior: *Not my will but Thine be done.* The basis of Christian contentment is the realization that God is in control of our lives; He controls our future and promises in His Word that nothing happens to us by accident; that everything is part of His sovereign plan, as Paul wrote: *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).*

4. When we realize that God is in control we can rejoice in every circumstance. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (Ja. 1:2-4; I Thess. 5:18).* The baby boomer generation has never really gone through any hard times. Those of you old enough to remember the great depression know what it meant to do without. If dinner was cornbread, flour gravy and beans you were thankful for it. If a man in your neighborhood got a job mowing a lawn he was happy and all of his neighbors were happy for him. I think if an employer were to offer an entry level job to the Wall Street protestors most wouldn't take it. They are not interested in working they want the government to provide for them. Difficult times shape and reveal character and I'm sorry to say that the recent economic troubles in our nation reveal a lack of character in many of the leaders and citizens of our nation. Paul wrote Philippians from a Roman prison. *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say rejoice (Phil.4:4). For me to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).* Paul wrote to Timothy: *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment (clothing) let us be therewith content (I Tim. 6:6-8)*
5. Being discontented is really the sin of covetousness. *Let your conversation (way of life) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5).* Covetousness is the sin of idolatry (Col. 3:5b). It is a sinful desire for more than you possess; the lust for gain and the sin of greed; *the love of money the root of all evil (I Tim. 6:10).* Covetousness is at the root of all wars and conflicts. *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not (Ja. 4:1-2).* What causes war? It's very simple: You have something I want and I'm going to take it from you. Men have been taking things from other people since the beginning of time and if their nation is more powerful than yours there is nothing you can do about it. The government has made it legal to take what belongs to one person and give it to someone who refuses to work. That is the cause of this struggle. Is there injustice in the world? Yes! The Christian church should expose and fight against corruption and greed in the government, banks, or corporations, but we must never forget that greed, theft, and evil cut through the heart of every one of us. Jesus said: *Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses (Lu.; 12:15).* Being content with our lives is no option for the Christian.

II.

6. *What are the secrets to Christian Contentment?* If we are going to learn contentment we must begin by remembering the promises revealed in God's Word. If God sent His Son into the world to die for your sins and redeem your soul to God He will certainly give you everything else you need in life. What is daily bread compared to the forgiveness of sins? Therefore I urge you to consider all that God has given you in Christ. You have been freely redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled to God. *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (Rom. 3:24; 5:1).* How can a child of God be depressed, miserable and discontented when God has taken away his sins and made him His child by faith? *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you (Phil. 4:8-9).* Once you consider what God has given you, next think of what you truly deserve! All of our difficulties in life are nothing compared to what our sins deserved. *The wages of sin is death!* We are all sinners that deserve God's wrath and punishment.

7. Also think of all of the good things you have received in life that you did not deserve. Men get angry when things go badly for them because they think they deserve better, they have a right to God's blessing and God somehow owes them. But they are mistaken. Sinners have no rights before God! The Lord doesn't owe you anything. Where do we get the idea that God or other people owe us something? We stand before God by His grace alone and each day He pours out innumerable blessings upon us that we do not deserve. If you will look at any circumstance in life you can thank God for something. Matthew Henry was once robbed on the street at knifepoint and later wrote in his journal. *Let me be thankful first, because I have never been robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third because although they took everything I had it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.* Gratitude is essential to true contentment. *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:16-18).*

8. Another help in contentment is to consider other people in the world who have it far worse than you. Think of the millions of people in this world who have never heard the Gospel and live in nations where ignorance, spiritual darkness, disease, poverty, violence, and chaos abound with little hope of a better life. God has blessed each of us abundantly. The citizens of this country have very little to complain about. But the real treasures we have in this life are found in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we have forgiveness of sins, peace with God, answer to prayer, the knowledge of God, deliverance from death, and an eternity in heaven. In our epistle lesson Paul outlines the great doctrinal treasures the Holy Spirit has given us through the Word; *one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, and One God and Father of all.* Christians are blessed beyond measure. God's tells us these things to free you from misery, self pity, and complaining and to give you a heart of thanksgiving, confidence, and hope for the future. Therefore confess your lack of contentment as sin and humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Jesus said in our Gospel lesson: *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* James wrote: *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up (Ja. 4:10).* Peter tells us to stop worrying and cast all of our cares and anxieties upon Christ Jesus for He cares for us.

9. The Christian can say with David: *The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want (be in need of anything)*. God will provide our needs. *But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19)*. Contentment is the secret to confidence in God's Word that will make you bold and courageous before the world. When a child of God is content with what God gives him he will not be afraid to stand for the truth. In the Book of Hebrews the author connects these two truths when he writes: *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6)*. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives makes us content with the things He has given us. If we have Christ what else do we really need? If we have Him we have the true God and everything else. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)*. His presence can turn a prison cell or a deathbed into a house of worship and He promises never to leave or forsake us. Because God is our helper we need not fear what man can do to us. Here is the secret to courage and boldness before men therefore may God grant true contentment to each of us for Christ's sake; Amen!