

Pentecost 19
October 15, 2017
Christ the King

A Concise Homily

Text: Philippians 4:4-6

How many of you guessed from the title of the sermon that this was going to be your lucky day, the day of "the 3-minute sermon"?

A brief word of introduction to our newcomers and visitors. Every December we have a church auction, with lots of interesting items. One of them is the joy of selecting all the hymns for some Sunday. We sang those just a few weeks ago.

Another is the 30 minute sermon which a group of bidders can whittle down to just 3 minutes if they chip in ten dollars for each minute which is omitted up to a total of \$270. I'm sure they could get a full \$300, eliminating the sermon all together, but that would be too humiliating.

So how many of you chipped in towards the 3 minute minimum? OK. The rest of you will have to stay after worship for the full length sermon.

So, on my mark. No. wait. Before we begin I need to say that I really welcome the challenge each year of being so concise. Because sermons usually begin with a humorous anecdote, a personal story, or some Biblical or historical background on the text. But those all have to be eliminated today to get to the heart of the matter.

So, omitting all that fun stuff, let's get right to it, shall we. Now, on my mark . . . Oh, just one more thing. I'm choosing part of the Second Reading for today, from Paul's letter to the Philippians, because it's my favorite verse in

the whole Bible. In fact, whenever there's an ordination and the clergy encircle the candidate being ordained, each of us, placing a hand on his or her head speaks a verse from Scripture, and here's the one from today's text which I always recite:

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice. Let all people know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:4-6).

Are you ready? Three minutes, beginning now.

This passage isn't only good advice for a new pastor about to begin his or her ministry, it's wonderful encouragement to all of us.

First there's that exhortation to rejoice. Not to simply be happy all the time, that's not possible or even appropriate, but to rejoice, rejoice in the Lord, i.e. because of the Lord. For he has redeemed us. He's declared us righteous because of our faith. He's promised to be with us through everything and to take us to himself when our life here has ended, so that where he is we may be also.

There's a lot of history between each of us and Jesus. He's been a part of our lives, every step of the way, and still is. So with all that going for us, we have every reason to rejoice in the Lord always.

And Paul is so adamant about it that he repeats himself, "Again I say rejoice." He means it. Now here's the amazing context. He's writing this letter while sitting in a prison cell, not knowing when or if he'll ever be released.

So he says earlier on in this same letter, "Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance."

That's confidence. That's hope. He calls it forbearance when he says, "Let all people know your forbearance."

Why? Because although we don't know what's coming, because we don't know the future, we know who's coming, and that's what also makes us hopeful and confident. "The Lord is at hand."

"Do not worry about anything," or, another version, "Have no anxiety about anything." Either way, wouldn't that be wonderful. To not be pestered by anxiety. How could that be possible?

Here's how, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

As St. Paul says elsewhere, "cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you."

This is a beautiful letter. It's called his "letter of joy" because he uses that word eleven times in just a few pages. Sit down and read it this week. It will take you all of five minutes. Which is just a little longer than this sermon.

Which reminds me. We're about finished. So I'll conclude with the next verse of this passage which is the way I end all of my sermons: "And the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen."

