

October 8, 2017 (Thanksgiving Sunday)

Sermon: Thankfulness during difficult times

By: Carol-Ann Chapman

Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters- whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,^[b] help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

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

⁸Finally, beloved,^[e] whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[f] these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Earlier this year I attended a funeral for a woman who was the mother of my childhood friend and who was also my babysitter for a period of time. One of the things I remembered about her was that she liked to bake fresh bread. Before she would bake it she would put it onto the bathroom counter where she would cover it with a towel and let it rise...when we would see this, we knew it wouldn't be long before it would be in the oven and the house would be permeated with

the most amazing smell of baking bread. Then when it was done she would take it out and slice us each a thick piece, slather it with butter and give it to us for a snack. As I re-live the memory I can smell and taste the bread's freshness. It was difficult to say goodbye to the woman who was so much a part of my childhood, but I was thankful for the part she had played in my life and for the memories of such things as baking bread.

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” **“Do not worry about anything”**, hard to believe that these words were written by Paul, a man who had been thrown into and had written this letter from jail. How can we not worry? How can we be thankful at times like these? Monday morning I woke up to find out a lone gunman had let loose at a Vegas hotel, killing at more than 50 people and wounding in excess of 500 others. How do we not worry when two men of international power are controlling weapons of mass destruction and like a couple of school yard bullies, have a war of words calling each other names like Rocket Man and Dotard...How do we not worry when so many places have been left in a state of devastation due to storms and hurricanes. How do we not worry when we have friends suffering from illness, or children struggling to make ends meet...how do we not worry when we're waiting for the Dr. to call us with test results...or even worse when the test results come in and the medical profession still doesn't have an answer. And Paul doesn't just say don't worry, he then proceeds to say, **but in everything pray with thanksgiving**. So when life is difficult...when there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel...where do we turn...how do we let go of the worry and how can we be thankful?

The Psalms are often a great place to find refuge...there are Psalms that express grief and sorrow...others express joy and love. In Psalm 46 we are reminded that it is God who is our strength and our refuge. We are told in this Psalm not to fear, even if the earth should change, the mountains shake or when the nations are in an uproar. God is a safe place to hide, ready when we need him...We all experience times when things in our lives fall apart; Health, wealth, job security, family and friends...but we have one constant...and that is God.

No one knows what tomorrow will bring...all the worrying in the world won't change things...but something we can hold onto is that our God is the same yesterday, as today and as God is tomorrow. God's promises are ours. Putting our worries aside...being thankful in all circumstances only happens when we recognize that God is the one source of strength and refuge that we can depend on...God is our security... in this life and the life to come.

Today we gather for communion and Thanksgiving. The bread and the wine that Jesus gave us to use to help remember him, help us also to remember that in life there is One who is constant...One who understands us... One who is always there and will never forsake us.

The Bread we will eat today is a symbol of God's constant presence in our lives. When Jesus celebrated the last meal with his friends he wanted to leave them with something that would remind them¹ and the followers yet to come of his daily presence. At his final meal, bread was one of the elements...something that most people would have had present at a meal. Meat and fresh herbs were

¹ George Alves, *Being Thankful in Difficult Times*. October 6, 2001.
<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/being-thankful-in-difficult-times-george-alves-sermon-on-thanksgiving-holiday-39856?page=2>

more difficult to come by, but bread was the staple that all people, both rich and poor were likely to have at their table making it the perfect food for remembrance.

In the Bible bread was used when God's blessing was pronounced. It was consumed as a seal of agreement. It was a focus of Israel's feasts. It was used during their offerings in the Tabernacle and the Temple. It was also a symbol of the Presence of God in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. When plentiful, Bread was a sign of God's closeness and his blessing. Bread was eaten during journeys, and at home. It was the minimum food ration for prisoners and an essential ingredient at feasts. It was eaten during battles and eaten when all were at peace. Bread was eaten by the elite religious leaders and also by the common people.²

When I was younger I attended a church that served communion bread in the form of wafers. To me they seemed bland and the only place I ate them was at church so they didn't have much meaning to me....and then as an adult I attended a church that served communion with real bread. Bread that was baked by some of the ladies in the church and some mornings it was baked fresh in the church kitchen and you could still smell the aroma of baking when you walked through the church doors. I remember the first time I saw the minister break off a piece of bread to share it. I thought this is like a real meal...this is how Jesus would have shared it at the last supper with the disciples...this is what communion was meant to be like...it is the reason today I like to use Pita, because this is the kind

² Ibid.

of bread Jesus would have used. When I break it...when I consume it I am reminded that Jesus has not left...Jesus is present and I am not alone.

So this is how we can be thankful during difficult times...remember the bread and remember what was promised by the giver of that bread on the night he was betrayed...on the night when things looked bleak for him. Remember that He said...I will be with you to the end of time...remember...remember...and do this in remembrance of me.

God is our refuge and our strength...supporting us in times of trouble...we have no need to fear or to worry because God is with us whether it is the storms of the sea or the storms of life...Our God...is never changing...Our God is a constant presence. A presence that can be found in the comforting smell of a baking loaf...or in the sharing of communion bread... and for this, we can be truly thankful.

Amen.