

“ENCOURAGEMENT ON DEMAND”

Philippians 4:4-13, Proper 23-A
Pentecost 18, October 12, 2014

You can pick up virtually **any TV remote control** today that is on **loan to you by your Cable Service Provider** and readily spot an **ORANGE BUTTON** that says next to it: **“ON DEMAND.”** This “On Demand” feature allows you to watch all sorts of television programs at a time that is convenient to you; be it a movie, a television program or some type of news documentary. Some of these movies and programs are free; others come with a hefty price-tag. But this same kind of freedom and feature is available to you also now through **your DVR** (digital video recorder). No longer do you have to be home at a certain time to watch a program at the time when it is originally being broadcast by the television network. Now you can watch your program at a time that is convenient to you—**that fits your schedule!** This is television on demand.

This past week, as I took a close look at these words of our epistle lesson this morning—it suddenly dawned on me that what St. Paul is offering to you and me here also is: **“ENCOURAGEMENT ON DEMAND.”** Paul is teaching us that God’s encouragement is available to us at any time in our lives when we are feeling **DISCOURAGED, FEARFUL, ANXIOUS** and **WORRIED!**

I. THIS KIND OF ENCOURAGEMENT COMES TO US WHEN WE ARE FILLED WITH THE JOY OF THE LORD. And yet St. Paul is **not suggesting, even for a minute, that this kind of joy is something that we can muster up** for ourselves. When St. Paul tells us: *“Rejoice in the Lord, always! And again I say rejoice!”* he is wanting us to **RECEIVE THAT KIND OF JOY** into our lives that is nothing less than one of the great nine fruits of our sanctification that is given to us by the Holy Spirit of God and is spoken about in Galatians 5:22.

Friends, I do not know about you, but I do know that there are some things in my life that I can do for myself and there are other things that I can’t do at all. When I finally admitted to myself that I needed a new roof on my house 5 years ago, I didn’t think for a minute that I could go over to **HOME DEPOT** or **LOWES**, purchase some tar paper, some roofing nails and shingles in order to tackle that project by myself. Instead, I phoned a roofing company.

When I go to the gym I sometimes see two young men working out together to encourage one another to give their workouts their all! I sometimes will see a young man on a bench press straining to push all the weight on that bar that he can possibly push upward, but behind him is his friend, who is serving not only as a “spotter” (a guy to catch the bar if it turns out to be too much for him); but in addition the spotter is offering his friends words of encouragement: **“Push, push, push! You can do! You got it! Give it your all!”**

Christians are being **encouraged by St. Paul** here to always find a **reason to be joyful**, though there are many ways to define joy! **Joy isn’t just a smile or a laugh!** Joy, as the Bible speaks about joy, is something that is **deep within a person that doesn’t leave a person quickly.** When we have the joy of the Lord, we’ll know it and others will know it too! **Someone once said the only thing worse than not having joy is stealing someone else’s.**

Friends, if we truly are joyful, we want other people to have joy too; and if we truly have joy then we don’t want to do anything to bring others down! Isn’t this something we learn from our Savior himself? On the night before he died, our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples in that Upper Room: *“These things have I spoken to you while I am still with you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full!”* (John 15:11).

And later on in the opening words of his first epistle, we hear the **Apostle John** saying the same thing to the church in his day: *“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—*

this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us! We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete!" (I John 1:1-4)

II. SECONDLY, THIS KIND OF ENCOURAGEMENT COMES TO US WHEN WE TAKE OUT TIME IN OUR BUSY LIVES TO DO THE VERY THING THAT WE ARE DOING WITH ONE ANOTHER HERE AGAIN THIS MORNING—TAKING OUT TIME TO OFFER OUR SUBPLICATIONS AND PETITIONS TO GOD WITH THANKSGIVING.

Yes, there are times when Jesus teaches us in his Sermon on the Mount how necessary it is for us to go off by ourselves somewhere and spend time alone with our Heavenly Father in prayer. But one thing I should point out to you---that is not readily apparent to you in the English text, but that is **readily apparent in the Greek text** is that St. Paul is writing to the church, and the **forms of the verbs he is using** here are **not the singular forms**, but the **plural forms**, meaning not just "you" as an individual but "you" as in "you all" or "you guys" as the way people sometimes say things in the Midwest.

"Rejoice, in the Lord, you all!" something kind of like the way that Paula Dean would say it! And how often should the church rejoice in the Lord? Paul says **"always"**! And to reiterate how important this is, St. Paul here repeats himself, the way that preachers sometimes do, even as Jesus often did. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say rejoice!"*

Friends St. Paul was practicing what he preached! He was chained to a Roman guard when he pens these words! St. Paul was not only writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was also **writing out his own experience**. We can read about the first time he and Silas went to Philippi in response to the Holy Spirit's own urging of him to do so—in Acts 16. To make a long story short, there was a young slave girl who was a fortune teller, who made the men who owned her a great deal of money, because she was so good at what she did. St. Luke says she could do this because she had a "spirit of divination" within her; an evil spirit. For days she followed around Paul and Silas, wherever they would go, and she kept saying out loud: *"These men are servants of the Most High God! These men are servants of the Most High God!"* to the point, Luke says, that the Apostle Paul was feeling awfully annoyed! In a moment of frustration, feeling harassed no doubt, Paul turns around and looks at this young girl and commands the spirit of divination to come out of her, which it does! But in the casting out of that spirit, the young girl also lost her capacity to be a fortune teller! Do you get it? **St. Paul had just "killed the goose that laid the golden egg," so to speak!**

The owners of this slave girl, who are now out of business, press charges against Paul and Silas and have them thrown into jail—on religious grounds they contended—saying that they were corrupting the Jewish faith. But what does Paul do? What does Silas do? **We read in Acts 16:25 that at midnight, even though they were in stocks in addition to being locked behind prison bars, they began to pray out loud they began singing hymns!**

Can't you just see them there! All of the other prisons must have thought that they guys were off their rockers, that they had gone looney-bins! There they are, praying out loud together, and singing: "Praise to the LORD the Almighty, the King of Creation! O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation! Let all who hear now to his temple draw near, joining in glad adoration!" (LSB 790)

And first thing you know, there is an earthquake and they are released from their stocks, all of the chains on all of the prisoners fall off and the doors of all the prison cells spring open!

And the jailer, who is fearful this will mean his certain death, cries out, "Brother, what must I do to be saved?" And Paul says: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household!" (Acts 16:31)* And the jailer and his entire household were baptized later that same evening.

You see, St. Paul, by the grace of God, practiced what he preached, and good things came of it!

Sometimes, as I pastor, I get really concerned when people in our church are going through tough times, when they or a loved one is seriously ill, or when a loved one has died, or when their business is failing, or one of their children maybe is going through a rebellious stage! And what do some believers do? **They quit coming to church!** Instead of calling the pastor or the lay minister and saying, *“I am really going through a terrible time and am greatly discouraged, could you me a little bit more about **this Stephen Ministry program** that you have going on at church?”* some people unfortunately, just quit coming to church!

Paul says that we are most apt to access this kind of encouragement from God on demand when we are filled with the joy of the Lord, when we take out time to pray with thanksgiving to God, by ourselves and with one another, letting all of our requests be made known to him. Paul also says we are most apt to receive this kind of encouragement from God on demand:

III. THIRDLY, WHEN WE ARE BEING REASONABLE.

Sometimes when we are having a discussion with someone else who seems to be “irrational” to us, we may plead with them: **“Be reasonable!”**

When realtors are dealing with clients who want them as realtors to sell their home in the hopes of making a killing of a profit, the realtor may say to her client: **“Be reasonable!”**

The New King James Version of the Bible translates this verse by saying: *“Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand!”* (v. 5)

If we truly believed that Jesus could appear at any moment and see what we are doing, we might react to life and other people more carefully with godliness and gentleness. **Joy is an inner response, yet gentleness is how joy and trust in God are demonstrated in our outward behavior.** When we really believe God is in control of our lives, we don’t need to be harsh with our words and actions in our dealings with others.

This Greek word *epiekes* is sometimes translated as: **“forbearance,” “patience,” “moderation,” “gentleness” and “reasonableness.”**

Part of what this means is that we do not seek revenge or take destructive actions towards someone who has hurt us. **It’s the idea of being gracious and understanding of someone’s weaknesses and inadequacies**, even when you have every right to take justice against that person. Certainly, this is the very approach to life and other people that Jesus is talking about when says: **“If someone slaps you are the right cheek, turn the left cheek to him also” (Matthew 5:39)**

Jesus again exemplified gentleness to those who were treated with contempt by others. He surprised his followers by **paying attention to the needs of people whom others didn’t care about at all; children, widows, and those considered outcast by virtue of their greatly deteriorating health or some other form of being physically or mentally handicapped!**

Jesus forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery! Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well who wasn’t respected in her village. Even though Jesus knew she had had five husbands, and that she was currently living with a man without benefit of clergy,” Jesus forgave her and comforted her. Jesus forgave “Peter” after Peter had denied him.

IV. FOURTHLY, WHEN OUR HEARTS ARE BEING GUARDED BY THE PEACE OF GOD! (v. 8)

The Greek word that is translated as “guard” here is a military term meaning **“to protect or garrison by guarding.”** Philippi was a Roman colony and there were Roman soldiers stationed all around the city to keep the peace. In Paul’s day they would stand at attention with ready weapons to make any attackers know they would

defend their position. Through the Holy Spirit's power in the heavenly realm, when we pray, God establishes a guard around our hearts that protects further fear and worry from entering our heart's door.

Let's remember, however, that being "anxious" is far different from being "concerned." When we are worried or anxious, we are trying to be "god" in that situation. We believe that we can control the situation and that we know best. The next time you are tempted to be worried because you can't control what's happening, stop trying to take God's place in your life.

We can't really make or force inner peace to come into our souls, these come only as a result of our trusting God with our concerns. It also occurs within the heart when it seems impossible that such peace could be found under difficult and try circumstances.

V. FIFTHLY, WHEN WE ARE THINKING POSITIVE THOUGHTS.

Brothers and sisters, I do not have time to speak about each of these positive aspects of life, as virtues, that Paul says we should be thinking about, but we all are aware of that verse in the Old Testament in Proverbs 23:7, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he!*"

Back in the 1980s there were places in this country where wolves were in danger of extinction and there was a special bounty actually offered for any wolves that were caught alive. Each live wolf that was brought into captivity would bring a \$5000 reward to the one who captured it. This opportunity turned two men named Sam and Jed into fortune hunters. They headed for the forest, where day and night they looked for their \$5000 wolf, but they couldn't find him. **It was hopeless, they thought, and they were about to give up the search completely. But on what they thought was going to be the final night of their search, where they were camped in a clearing, Sam awoke to find more than 50 wolves surrounding his camp. Their eyes were aflame and their teeth were bared. Sam nudged Jed and said, "Jed, wake up! We're rich!"**

Now this is what it means to have a pretty good attitude and a positive outlook on life! Perhaps you've heard that old saying: "Two men looked out from behind the prison bars; the one to the mud and the other to the stars!" One looked at that which inspired him and was grateful, the other looked only at the ground.

Or what do you think about those two men who were sent by a shoe manufacturer into a remote country to sell shoes? One man wrote back to the shoe manufacturing headquarters: "I have terrible news. This is a God-forsaken country. Nobody here wears shoes! I am coming home!" While the other man wrote back to the shoe manufacturing headquarters: "This is a wonderful country. I am so grateful you sent me to this territory. Nobody wears shoes. Send me 5000 pairs!"

What will you do when that day comes in your life, when you realize that your own positive attitude simply won't carry the day? What will you do on that day when the circumstances of your life will certainly do their best to overwhelm you? This is when you need encouragement the most. Thankfully, this is also the moment when you might realize that encouragement like this from God himself is actually available to you!

The peace that passes all understanding is one of the most precious forms of encouragement that God has ever given and will still today give to us! It's the solution for the pursuit of peace. It's the peace that comes when we avoid impure actions. And it's the satisfying answer in our chance for contentment and for the ability to actually enjoy life!

If you'd like to experience the peace that God offers, then choose joy in times of anxiety. And in an immoral world chose an intentional path of purity. Learn contentment in every situation you find yourself in in life.

A man once wrote: “When I was a boy, my mother made me a butterfly net. With that net I spent hours chasing butterflies on my grandparents’ farm. I don’t recall ever catching a single butterfly, which is why I put down the net decades ago. Since that time, however, it seems as if I have been surrounded by butterflies. They land on my hoe when I’m resting from yard work! They’re parked themselves on golf balls that I was preparing to hit, which was probably the safest place they could have landed. One time, they even landed on me, in some of my quieter moments!

Perhaps contentment and happiness are like butterflies. The more you chase them the more they fly away and hide. Come to think of it, chasing butterflies is a worthless endeavor. You can’t eat one and you can’t sell one. A butterfly won’t help you with your chores, and it would keep you company late at night. So it’s really a smart thing to put down the butterfly net.

Ironically, once you stop and busy yourself with things that have great value, like relationships with your family and friends, contentment and happiness will sneak up on you from behind and land on your shoulder. And you’ll have encouragement when you need it the most!

Paul had pulled it off through his persevering, life-long walk with the Lord!

Did you hear how Paul learned the true secret of contentment in life? Paul wrote, **“I am able to do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” (Phil. 4:13)** And isn’t this very legacy our Lord Jesus Christ promised to us who genuinely are his followers on the night before he died, when he said in that Upper Room that first Maundy Thursday: **“My peace I give to you, not as the world gives to you!” (John 14:27)**

This is the very same kind of peace that Paul is speaking to us about here, as Paul speaks to us about an encouragement from God to us that is available to us on demand, by virtue of our Lord’s own resurrection. **“Have no anxiety about anything! The LORD is at hand!” Amen**