November 29/30, 2025
First Sunday in Advent
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
Philippians 4:4-7
The Attitudes of a Christian

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

Do you ever feel like this cat? When are the times you try to fool yourself into thinking that "everything's fine" even though it probably isn't? Your car which has been making noises lately, and the check engine lights eventually comes on. Everything's fine! Christmas is only 3 and a half weeks away and you haven't even thought about your Christmas to-do lists. Everything's fine! We can tell ourselves all we want, "everything's fine," but aren't we fooling ourselves into a false sense of security?

If that's what you think, you're in the right place this weekend as we begin to prepare our hearts for the arrival of the King of kings. His arrival is the very reason we can truly say, "Everything's fine," regardless the currently difficulty in your life. That attitude is not a band-aid to cover our woes. It's a healing ointment because nothing can take away from us the peace of Christ that transcends all understanding.

What's interesting about our text today is that Paul would tell us that saying "everything's fine" really isn't good enough. That's our general, underlying attitude as Christians. But, Paul gets more specific, more bold. **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"**

Now, maybe you're thinking, "Really, Paul? It's one thing to command us to rejoice. I get that. But, to rejoice always? Is that even possible? Is that necessary? Easy for you to say, Paul, arguably the most famous and most successful missionary of all." Guess what. We need to stand with Paul and his command. Attitude number 1 today is that Christians rejoice always.

It would be difficult to take this command to heart and have a willingness to obey if it were coming from the pen of a man who had no heartache in his life. But, that's not the case. Humanly speaking, it wouldn't have been easy for Paul to say, "Rejoice always!" He's writing this letter under house arrest for the very gospel he continues to defend. And, you know Paul, he's had his fair share of tragedy: death threats, being left for dead, verbal persecution, guilt of past sins. He's not one speaking from a heart without ache. Rather, quite the opposite.

And, consider to whom he is writing this letter. We know some specific people who would've heard these words. Paul is writing to Lydia who was once burdened by the pressures of thinking she had to earn her way to heaven. He is writing to a girl who was demon possessed and controlled by slave owners. He is writing to a jailer who saw men die under his watch and whose guilt seemed overwhelming. He's telling these three individuals among many others who have their own tragedy to deal with, "Rejoice always!" It's a never ending attitude, which Paul brings out in the original Greek. **"Keep on rejoicing in the Lord always. I will say it again: Keep on rejoicing."**

I know a man who has 4 different types of cancers ruining his body. This man has been a faithful servant of the Lord throughout his life. He's served as an Elder, as a Sunday School teacher, as an organist, choir director, soloist among many other behind the scenes work. And, even as the cancers have been coursing through his body, he has served as a called worker in one of our church body's schools. How could the Lord allow this to happen to such a faithful Christian?

I don't think I've ever heard him ask that question. What I have heard, though is plenty of rejoicing. Plenty of joy for a life without too much health issues up to this point. Plenty of rejoicing that the Lord has kept him in the faith despite some moments of his own doubt. Plenty of rejoicing that this is all a reminder that the world's

medicine cannot heal him, but that God will heal him eternally in the life to come. I have asked myself the question, “Would I rejoice like that if such a situation would befall me?” Let that sink in as we allow attitude number 1 to simmer and as we turn toward attitude number two.

Paul also commands, **“Let your gentleness be evident to all.”** Let’s use a popular illustration to know what Paul is saying here. Are you a glass half-full or glass half-empty person? Someone who is naturally pessimistic will look at a situation and find the negative to dwell on like seeing a glass half full and saying, “But it’s half-empty.” Someone who is naturally optimistic will look at a situation and find the positive to dwell on like seeing a glass that’s missing half its contents and saying, “But it’s still half-full.” I think we can all identify with both. It depends on the situation if we’re optimistic or pessimistic.

When we’re pessimistic, we know we’re not easy company. We’re grouchy. We’re bitter. In other words, we’re not gentle. We’re not gentle when persecution is really getting to us. We’re not gentle when life isn’t going our way. We’re not gentle when the pressures of the world keep pressing down harder and harder on us.

It’s a neat privilege as a Pastor to see God’s gentle Word at work on a person’s heart. But, it’s not just for pastors to see. If you’ve had a chance to share God’s Word with someone who wasn’t really gentle in the moment, you know what I’m talking about.

A woman I once knew was admittedly stubborn. She recognized she could be tough to be around at times. Especially after she broke her back falling off a step stool in her elderly age. On a later visit with her, I figured what kind of state I’d still find her in: bitter, frustrated, maybe even mean. After all, she’d just gone through a lot. None of us would fault her feeling such ways and maybe taking it out on others without meaning to. But, that’s not what I found when I saw her. And, it wasn’t just the medication she was taking. When she was transferred to rehab, she made sure to have several devotional books and her Bible right next to her. She was displaying attitude number 2, gentleness, as if it was a natural part of her life. Well, after all, it was because she was a Christian. And, she had help practicing that attitude with the best teacher inside those books.

Which brings us to attitude 3, expressed in the negative. As a Christian, don’t be anxious. Easier said than done, right? How can we not be anxious with all the world events around us? How can we not be anxious with the stress due to the deadlines and hecticness of another holiday season? How can you not be anxious if you’re medically diagnosed as someone who struggles with anxiety?

Here's a start: remember who you are as a Christian and whom you have as a King: The Creator of all. What are you worried about? No matter what it is, is the One who created all things not able to help? Has he lost all power and control?

After starting to limit your anxiousness in that way, listen to what Paul also says. **“But in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”** Or, as Peter says in his letter, **“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)**

To be anxious results in putting confidence in ourselves. God is refocusing your attitude by having you put your confidence in him. You can have confidence in him as you think about all the blessings you have rather than the few things you don’t. He’s taken care of you before. He’ll continue to take care of you all the way into eternity.

3 attitudes of a Christian. How can we display them all with seemingly so much going against us both outwardly and inwardly? Is Paul, speaking on God’s behalf, asking too much? He’s not when we keep in mind two important thoughts that unite these verses containing these attitudes. The first thought is contained in two phrases: **“in the Lord”** and **“the Lord is near.”**

The basis for Paul’s rejoicing among his periods of trial, the basis for the Philippians’ rejoicing, yes the basis for every Christian’s rejoicing, being gentle, and refraining from anxiousness is in this phrase: **“in the Lord.”**

Without the Lord, a person would have to take everything at face value. Tragedy could offer nothing good. Happiness is only temporary. But, with the Lord, a Christian confesses that tragedy cannot take away the hope of eternal life. Earthly happiness may be temporary, but the joys of heaven are eternal.

It's because of the Lord that you have these attitudes and want to keep working on these attitudes. You are in the Lord because of your faith, and your Lord is in you. For that reason, you can rejoice in all things at all times. You can rejoice always even as you cry and mourn and grieve. I loved how one commentator put it. He wrote about rejoicing always, **"This means not the weary sigh, 'Well, at least I have my faith,' when some setback or sadness occurs. It means, even amid tears, an attitude that looks up and sees and relies on God's goodness, that looks for reasons and ways to express happiness."**

Yes, all these attitudes really center themselves on the attitude of contentment which says "everything's fine". And this attitude of yours can always be present because you are in the Lord which reminds you that the Lord is near. Certainly, he is always near because of his presence. But, Paul reminds us here of his nearness to come again. The King is coming with deliverance from all illness, from all persecution, from all difficulty. His arrival gives us reason to rejoice no matter what, to be gentle rather than gruff, and to let him take away our anxiousness. When you think of the hope you have in the coming King, these attitudes of you, dear Christian, will prevail.

The final thought which ties everything together today is the verse you hear often, perhaps most often at the conclusion of sermons. **"The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** Regarding this peace, Jesus says in the gospel of John, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."**

No matter what, God's peace is always with you. It will guard you from the temptation to put these attitudes in the closet until there's actually reason to display them. The peace of God you have in Jesus gives you persistent reasons to display these attitudes. That peace is found in the forgiveness of sins. That peace is found in the new life the Holy Spirit has given you. That peace is found in the certain knowledge of life eternal. It's the peaceful relationship you have with God.

So, yes, everything is truly fine. That's not just a statement to fool you into false thinking and false belief about the reality around you. The reality is always this: Jesus has come to be your humble King. Jesus is coming again as the King of kings to take you to your heavenly home. Life your eyes in anticipation of the imminent arrival of your King. He gives you reason upon reason to rejoice always, to be gentle in all situations, and to cast all your anxiety on him. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.