

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the Gospel reading Jesus' states, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Luke 10:2) At District Convention of the churches of the WELS AZ/CA District, which was very positive, one frustration was mentioned. We have mission opportunities, but not enough workers. Very often in the history of the church speak of lack of funds, money that keeps God's people from planting more churches or opening more missions. Today it is a lack workers. Another day it will be something else.

There will always be frustrations in connection with doing the Lord's work. I believe that part of the reason the Lord allows this is so that we see the need to pray regularly for the work of the church. We should keep praying, however, the Apostle Paul would encourage us to remember that we have joy that outweighs any frustrations.

Today as Jesus talks about the harvest and the need for workers. The apostle Paul reminds us of **Harvest Joy**. Just as Jesus and his disciples rejoiced when they came back from their mission trip, so we should rejoice at the opportunities and blessings connected with the harvest of souls, that is the saving of souls. We will hear of 1) *Joy in frustrations*, 2) *Joy in ministry* and 3) *Joy in Heaven*.

1. Joy in frustrations (as we work the harvest)

"*Joy in frustration*" sounds like a contradiction. How can we find joy in a situation where our problems are not resolved and needs aren't being met? You would think Paul would have been frustrated over his imprisonment. He had been in chains for three to five years. He admits that at times his supplies ran out. Was it his favorite foods, pens and parchment? Those are good guesses. However Paul says, "**I rejoiced greatly.**" He was filled with joy. We too need to find JOY IN FRUSTRATING situations. How did he do it? A. First the apostle took great joy in the CONCERN the Philippians showed for him.

1. They did not, for a time, have a means of expressing concern, but Ephraoditus informed Paul of their ongoing concern. This filled Paul with

joy because he may have felt alone, but now he knew that he had brothers and sisters in faith who cared and were supportive of him.

The caring attitude we see with the Philippians is found in Jesus.

2. JESUS' CONCERN was far greater than the Philippians because he left his throne in heaven and came to earth. His concern is expressed in the words and actions in Matthew 9, **Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.** (35-36) We see his concern not just for a few disciples or the Jews, but for the world as he sacrificed his life at the cross. We have joy in all situations because we have a Savior who is concerned and supportive.

B. The main source of St. Paul's joy is in Jesus. Jesus had made Paul STRONG to be CONTENT in all circumstances.

1. The apostle writes, **"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."** The record of Paul's life in the Scriptures shows us that he did not have an easy life. Not only was he beaten many times and left for dead on a few of those occasions, but he had been shipwrecked and spent a day and night on the open sea. That is suffering that is hard to imagine.

What was the secret of his contentment and happiness?

2. It is in Jesus and Paul expresses it in verse 13, **"I can do all this through him who gives me STRENGTH."** Jesus had made Paul his own by dying for him and taking away his sins. Jesus had promised to support him until the apostle was brought home to heaven. Knowing that Jesus would never fail him, Paul could be content that everything would always work out.

When we are down WE need to find our JOY IN JESUS. You find that joy when you remember that he died at the cross to take away your sins. That he defeated death for you at his resurrection. You need to remember and memorize his promises to support you. Our Savior put it this way in his sermon, **"Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you."** (Matthew 6:33)

2. Joy in ministry.

I remember years ago we had prayed in Bible class about some particular

trouble that a mission field was having. A person stopped after Bible class with their checkbook out and said, “Pastor, where can I send a gift? I want to help out.” I could see in that person’s eyes, there love for their Savior was moving them to help. The Philippians had JOY and so did Paul as they SUPPORTED his MINISTRY.

A. Ephraoditus had arrived from Philippi with their GIFTS. (18)

1. The gifts were meant to help him as he faced his many troubles. Paul says, **“14 Yet it was good of you to SHARE in my troubles.”** They could not help him with all his troubles, such as getting Caesar to let Paul go free. However, they could supply him with parchments, pens, maybe some homemade snacks and money so that he could buy things that were needed for ministry.

2. WE SHARE in the troubles of pastors, teachers and missionaries today when we learn about them in church reports and news by word of mouth. Then we pray and do what we can to give support. We may forget about our offerings put in the offering plate, but the Lord doesn’t and your called workers don’t as we see the Lord using those gifts to build his Kingdom. We give thanks!

B. ST. PAUL expresses his thankfulness and JOY in their gifts.

1. He expresses his joy in his ACKNOWLEDGMENT that he had received what they sent with Epaphroditus. We may feel at times a word of thanks, a email or text or a thank you card isn’t much. However, St. Paul shows us that saying thanks is important. I am sure the Philippians were happy when they received his thank you with the letter.

2. He also expresses in joy in saying that the gift is “AMPLE” meaning enough. It may be that Paul still had needs, but he doesn’t say so. He let’s his joy and contentment in Jesus show.

Years ago a church fell short of some of its OFFERING GOALS. The church was discussing the next year’s expectations so they could set up a budget. After awhile one of the things a veteran pastor said was, “We didn’t meet our goal last year, but let’s be THANKFUL for the gifts that we did receive.” I think there is always room for constructive criticism and healthy debate, however we also want to be sure and give thanks as we hear quarterly and annual reports concerning offerings, confirmations, baptisms, etc.

3. Joy in Heaven

I have mentioned joy for Paul, the Philippians and us, however, there is one

more person we need to talk about, GOD. There is Joy in Heaven too!

A. The apostle makes it very clear that GOD REJOICES in gifts for the ministry.

1. It is important to point out that a gift in support of ministry is a GIFT TO GOD. Whether it pushing a broom, moving chairs, cooking food or putting a gift in the offering plate, you are placing that into the hand of God. In doing that we are giving something back to our generous and loving Creator and Savior.

2. St. Paul tells how GOD FEELS, **“They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”** Old Testament sacrifices did not smell great, however, the Lord had commanded them. To him they were not only acceptable, but had a pleasing sweet aroma. So our offerings today are sweet to God.

B. The apostle also tells us that God has JOY in SUPPLYING our NEEDS. **“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”** (19) The Philippians would not go hungry or be without the things they needed. The Lord would be happy to provide. Jesus promises in Luke 6, **“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.”** (38)

C. Because the Lord’s goodness to him and the Philippians, St. Paul ends with a STATEMENT OF PRAISE, **“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** (20) Besides giving praise to God, the apostle may be looking ahead to when the Philippians and all of us get to joyfully praise our generous God in person in heaven. Part of the joy of heaven will be the opportunity to thank and praise God in person.

Conclusion: Someone might accuse St. Paul of being happy because he had some optimism that he was going to be let out his first imprisonment. When we hear him in prison at the end of his life, he is just as positive. In his final letter which was 2 Timothy he writes, **“6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”** (2 Timothy 4:6,7,8) He is filled with joy because the Lord has supported him all the way to the finish line. This is how it is for you and me as we live by faith. Through Jesus we give joyful service in his Harvest. Then we go home. Amen.