

‘THE ANTIDOTE OF GRATITUDE’  
A SERMON BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 4:4-13  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2018  
10:00 a.m.

I’d like to tell you the story of a poor fisherman this morning.

He lived in a hut.

He owned one leaky rowboat,  
a fish net, a stew pot and two wooden bowls.

One day he caught a large fish.

To his great surprise the fish talked.

It said, “Please don’t kill me.

If you let me go free, wish for anything you want  
and I will give it to you.”

“It’s a deal,” the fisherman said,

and he asked for seven gold coins.

One to pay someone to fix his leaky boat.

One to buy two porcelain soup bowls.

Two to buy two silver spoons.

One to buy himself some new clothes.

And two to buy some beautiful presents for his wife.

This could be a good place to fit into the story the quote,

‘and they lived happily ever after.’

But of course you know the story doesn’t end there

Seven gold coins did not make the fisherman happy.

After he spent the seven coins,

he wished he had asked for a hundred gold coins

so he could buy a nice cottage.

So with fingers crossed, the fisherman went back to the place

where he caught the fish and shouted,

“Fish of the sea, please come around and listen to me!”

No sooner had he shouted these words

than the fish came swimming toward him.

What is it you want? it asked.

The fisherman said,

'My wife and I are sick and tired of living in a hut.

We want to live in a nice cottage.'

You wish has been granted, the fish said.

Go home to your new cottage.

This too could be a good place to insert in the story

'and they lived happily ever after.'

But if you think this new cottage

made the fisherman and his wife happy,

well, you know how these stories go.

Both because you've heard them before.

But also because you have likely lived it.

And lived its truth.

So you know what's next.

After a couple of months they said to each other.

"This cottage is getting too small for us.

If only we could live in a bigger place, we would be happy.

It only took them a couple of months and they were asking,

Wouldn't it be nice to live in a castle?

The fisherman went back to the water's edge and called the fish.

The fish returned and asked,

'What do you want this time?'

'My wife and I want to live in a castle,' the fisherman said.

'Your wish has been granted,' the fish said.

'Go home to your castle.'

When the fisherman came home to his castle he said to his wife,

'Now we will live happily ever after!'

Turns out happily ever after

is only a couple of months.

He went back to the fish.

and back,

and back.

And story ends, they lived discontentedly ever after.

He was never satisfied.

Why was this fisherman never satisfied?

We tell ourselves we'd be satisfied if we were him.

But here we are Canadians,  
living in comfort  
in one of the safest, richest countries in the world,  
in one of the most prosperous times in human history,  
and we are not above discontent  
or wanting what we don't have.

There is something missing in us.  
Something, like the fisherman, we haven't learned.  
It's why we need a holiday like Thanksgiving.

How do we learn to stop wanting what we don't have?  
How do we get beyond the anxiety of always seeing what is missing,  
or what we don't have  
or wishing for something more or something else?

Our Scripture lesson today is part of Paul's letter  
to a church in the city of Philippi.  
This congregation had sent him a personal financial gift.  
They had taken up an offering and sent him money

to support him in his ministry.

It isn't unlike what we are doing this Thanksgiving  
for our colleagues and their families in Nicaragua.

Paul, as well as thanking the Philippian church,

he tells them how happy he is.

He says, "I have learned to be content

whatever the circumstances.

I know what it is to be in need,

and I know what it is to have plenty.

I have learned the secret,

the secret of being content in any and every situation,

whether well fed or hungry,

whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all things through him who gives me strength."

Paul learned the secret.

He has shared with us how he learned to take strength from the Lord,

for all these different circumstances.

Here's his advice for us.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything,

but in everything, by prayer and petition,

with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Then, brothers and sisters,

whatever is true, whatever is noble,

whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,

whatever is admirable—

if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—

think about those things.

Think about those things.

Not what you don't have.

Not what you want next,

Think about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable.

And there, in those thoughts,  
the God of peace will be with you.

Rejoice in the Lord.

Give your requests to God.

Then put your mind to what is pure, admirable, right, true, noble.

The Lord is near.

God will be with you.

There will be peace

And that, as simple as it is,  
is the path to contentment.

Give your requests to God and know the Lord is near.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9

writing to another church Paul reminds them of God's words

'My grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness.'

When people start feeling overwhelmed with what is before them,  
anxious about their needs,  
the most empowering piece of advice



I am ever able to share,  
includes looking to God, and giving it to God,  
in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.

I am always able to share this verse.

The Lord is near.

“You can do all things through him who gives you strength.”

You will be given what you need for the day.

His grace is sufficient.

Don't race ahead.

You can do today.

God is present in today.

God will be present in tomorrow.

God will show up the day after that.

You will have strength for today.”

The secret of being content in any and every situation,  
is having learned to trust,  
through giving thanks, through presenting your requests  
and through knowing

that the Lord is near.

and that His grace is and will be sufficient to the day.

There was another poor fisherman.

One day he was sitting on the dock, next to his boat,

looking out across the sea,

watching the seagulls overhead,

breathing the fresh air, rejoicing in every minute of it.

After a while a rich man came along,

sat down next to the fisherman and asked him,

‘Why aren’t you out there fishing?’

‘I’m not fishing out there,

because I’ve caught enough fish for the day.’

‘Why don’t you catch some more?’ the rich man asked.

The fisherman answered,

“What would I do with the fish?”

‘You would earn more money,’ the rich man said.

‘And with that money you could buy a motor for your boat,

and go into deeper waters and catch even more fish  
and make even more money.

Pretty soon you would make enough money to own three boats  
instead of one.

With those three boats you could make so much money  
that after a while you could own ten boats.

Then after a while you would make so much money,  
that you could be as rich as I am.'

'What would I do then?' the fisherman asked.

'Then you would really enjoy life,' the rich man said.

What do you think I'm doing right now? the fisherman asked.

Paul said,

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.

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

The Lord is near.

God says, 'My grace is sufficient for you.'

So, whether you have plenty,  
whether you are in need,  
the answer to contentment,  
is to rejoice, to give thanks,  
and to think about what is praiseworthy.

Present your requests

and to learn to trust that the Lord is near,  
and that his grace is sufficient.

In doing this,

the God of peace will be with you.

You will have all you need.

Amen.