

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Thanksgiving Eve
Wednesday, November 27, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.

“It Is Well With My Soul”

Philippians 4:6-20

St. Paul tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything.” And as you are sitting here, praying that the turkey turns out right (or in the case of the Eden household, we do ham) because you have a dozen relatives coming for dinner tomorrow, you say: “Don’t be anxious about anything? That’s easy for you to say.” It is easy for me to say. My job is to watch football. I witness the struggle every year – everything needs to be hot and ready at the same time. “Don’t be anxious?”

When we hear these words from St. Paul, we need to remember that Paul was not writing to people who had the same problems we do. We worry about eating too much food. Most people in his day did not have that problem. Most people were more concerned with life on the other end of the spectrum. It is important to understand this when we hear his next words: “but in **everything** by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.”

Especially during this holiday season, we seem to get consumed with everything needing to be perfect. Thanksgiving dinner needs to be perfect. I need to find that perfect Christmas gift. Just as Christmas is not all about giving or

receiving the “right” or “perfect” gifts, so too, for God’s people, Thanksgiving is not about turkey, sweet potatoes, and stuffing all turning out just right.

Thanksgiving is not about pumpkin pie and the perfect party.

For God’s people, Thanksgiving is a day to return thanks to our Creator and Redeemer who is the source of every material and spiritual blessing. On this Thanksgiving holiday, do not be anxious or worry about the unimportant things about which the world has moved us to fret about. But in **all** things: “Rejoice!”

Again, Paul is speaking to a population, many of whom were slaves. Many of them struggled daily with the basic needs of life. Paul says, “in everything . . . [come to God] with thanksgiving.”

We find it hard to relate to the people of past generations who endured famine and shortages of food; who endured terrible persecution. As our society, we have strange priorities. With what happened in North Carolina in particular, and other places with the hurricanes this year, we are reminded that comfort can be fleeting.

Last week, on Wednesday afternoon, as I was writing this sermon, I clicked on Yahoo News to see an update on California. I have been keeping track of the fires in Southern California and I was talking with my parents over lunch about the “Bomb Cyclone” massive rain and snow storm hitting Northern California. It would have been nice if some of that rain could have been farther south.

So I typed “California” into Yahoo search and clicked “News.” The big headline story (out of California) was that the Menendez brothers were not going

to get a clemency hearing and become eligible for parole for killing their parents in 1996.

I couldn't believe it. That was the "biggest" news of the day? A nearly 30 year old tabloid story rather than focusing on the immediate needs of people who have lost their homes – or their lives. As the Roman orator Seneca said 2000 years ago, "We have only learned unimportant things."

So I was struggling with what to focus on and I thought about the hymn "When Peace, Like a River." The story of the author of that hymn is a well-known story, and is worth retelling – especially given the tumult of both fire and water on both ends of our nation this year.

Horatio Spafford, a wealthy lawyer from Chicago whose home and all of the real estate he owned were consumed in the great Chicago fire. In 1873, wanting to get his family away from that devastation, he booked passage on a boat to Europe for his wife and four daughters. The boat sank and all four of his daughters died. He met up with his wife, sailed with her to England, and on the way there, he wrote the hymn: "When Peace, Like a River" He wrote:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

St. Paul tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything." This is what he is talking about. When Paul encourages us to give thanks, this is not only for the "good" things in life. The world says to "count your blessings." Thanksgiving is

not an inventory of all the good things in God's creation. It is the realization that we are His people, everything comes from Him, and our relationship with Him is framed in the cross – not in the counting of things.

We do turn to God and give thanks for clothing and shoes, food and drink, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, etc. We have done that even tonight. God likes to give good gifts to His children. Be thankful for all that you have.

But in that, be thankful for **all** that you have – even the struggles and hardships and loss that you would like to do without. For this, give thanks.

If you are celebrating with family and friends, rejoice and give thanks to God that He has given you family and friends. If there are friends or members of your family with whom you can no longer celebrate, because the Lord has called them out of this life, rejoice and give thanks to God. Give thanks for the time God granted you to spend with them. Give thanks for each moment you shared. Every day, every breath is a gift from Him. Give thanks for **all** that you have been given.

“Let your requests be made known to Him with thanksgiving.” The peace of God does surpass all understanding. There are times and circumstances which challenge our hearts and minds. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, come to God in prayer with thanksgiving and say, “It is well with my soul.” Amen.