

At peace

15 10 17

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith,
that, forsaking what is behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy.

Our text may be found in Paul's letter from the Philippians, chapter 4 and verse 7:

‘. . . the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. . .’

Do you have a favourite text in the Bible, something that really speak to you, captures your imagination, something that, once you've heard it once, sticks in your mind as something well worth remembering ? Our text today ‘. . . the peace of God which surpasses all understanding . . .’ is one such text for me.

It's the summer of 1969 – nearly fifty years ago ! I've left school and I'm about to leave home and go off to university. I go to church and the preacher talks about ‘the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. . .’ And, with my life about to change, I know that God's peace is what I truly want and from that moment on, I begin to take my faith in Christianity seriously.

So Paul is offering young Christians in the church at Philippi the chance to be at peace, to be centred, focused, to know who they are and what they are and what God wants them to do.

So how do we do it? How do we manage to be at peace? Well Paul provides a simple check-list – just four things:

- ✓ Rejoice
- ✓ Be gentle
- ✓ Don't worry
- ✓ Pray

First, to rejoice. Paul writes, 'Rejoice in the Lord always and again I will say rejoice.' Rejoice means to be happy, to be joyful, to be positive, optimistic, always looking on the bright side of things. You know as well as I do that there are so many nasty things going on in the world today but the trick is to see what is good out there, who is good out there and be grateful for the positive. And with the bad stuff, to see how good may come of it, out of it, in spite of it.

Then, to be gentle. Paul writes, 'Let your gentleness be known to everyone.' Gentle means the opposite of being harsh, nasty, rude – to be gentle means being soft and kind and polite. We all know the word gentleman and it means someone of good birth, from a nice family, but essentially a gentleman is someone who behaves well and if you are gentle with your friends, then they will love you for being so good, so kind, so sensitive with them when they need to be cherished.

Thirdly, don't worry. Paul writes, 'Do not worry about anything'. Again, easier said than done. There are real risks out there when for example you're walking along the street connected to your friends on your mobile phone. The danger of having it snatched by a guy riding pillion or of you walking into the road under the wheels of a car, lorry or bus. So risk assessment is wise but the truth is we should avoid making worrying about things our default position. The worry with worry is it's a bottomless pit, never satisfied no matter how much time you spend worrying about what might happen. So forget worry and be present in the present.

And lastly to pray. Paul writes 'in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God.' Prayer is being in dialogue with God. Speaking to him and listening to him. It's about thanking him for all the good things, saying sorry for some of the bad things you've done and asking for things you need. If you pray, you are staying in touch with God and he really is there, near to you, close to you, part of your family and your friend.

So may you want to be at peace, may you have the will to be at peace and may you do what's necessary to be at peace: to rejoice, be gentle, not worry and to pray and if you do then God truly will be close to you and you will be at peace in yourself.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the 8.00 Holy Communion
St Mary the Virgin, Potters Bar
15th October, 2017*

