

Pastor Jon's sermon from July 7, 2024, based on 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

"Faith in Jesus Brings Contentment"

In our Second Reading the Apostle Paul uses the word content to describe how his faith helps him navigate the difficulties and struggles in his life. 12:10 he says, Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

I was blessed to go on our Church's Guatemala mission trip a few years ago. Our church has partnered for years with the organization From Houses to Homes to build two brick homes for families near Antigua. I vividly recall our dedication ceremony after the home was complete. Oscar, the director of from Houses to Homes, came to the building site and spoke with the family and us. I don't understand much Spanish, but I heard repeat the word "Contentos" at least 20 to 30 times. Contentos can be translated in English as "happy, pleased, glad, satisfied, or content." As the family was about to receive the key to new their new home with beds and mattresses, windows, a locking door, and a water purifier, Oscar spoke and prayed for contentos for them. He wanted them to be happy, satisfied, and content.

If I was to choose one word to describe my faith in Jesus Christ, it would be the word, "content". I want to live into that word each day as a Christian. No matter what I go through in life, the ups or downs, the joys and sorrows. Successes or failures, I want to be content in the hope we have in Jesus Christ. No matter what the world throws at me, or the arrows Satan tries to fling at me, I long to be content with who I am, where I am going, and how I should live my daily life as a Christian in community with others. How about you?

My favorite verse Bible Verse mentions the word "content". In Philippians 4:11, Paul says, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have." He knew what it is like to have plenty, and to be in want, but in any and all things, he learned the secret of being content."

Keep in mind that Paul wrote Philippians from prison. It is known as his letter of Joy. He would say things like, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” Paul longs to be with the Philippians again, but he is uncertain if he will live or die. Regardless, he has come to a place of peace and contentment.

Well, I have good news for you, contentment can be found in our faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. We will look for contentment in many places and projects, distractions or purchases. They will always leave us wanting for more.

It’s true, we will all face difficulties in our lives... uncertainties... times when we are up against it... probably not persecutions like Paul and the Apostles did, but we each have our own cross to bear. But because of our faith, when we are weak, then we are strong.

In 2nd Corinthians, the Corinthians are taken by some super apostles, as Paul calls them... some false prophets, who are coopting the Christian Gospel. And the Corinthians are falling for it. These super apostles speak eloquently and boast of their stories of coming through great hardships on their own merit. Their focus is not on Christ crucified and risen as Paul teaches.

Paul teaches that true followers of Jesus don’t boast in their strengths, but in their weaknesses. However, Paul did meet one guy who had a near death experience and was called up to the 3rd heaven or paradise and returned. He might have a reason to boast. But not Paul. Paul had a condition that kept him in check that he described as “A Thorn in his flesh.” Scholars don’t specifically know what it was, but it slows him down, makes him rely more on God, and keeps him from boasting in his own abilities and gifts to bring the gospel of others. Paul prayed 3 times for the thorn in his flesh to be taken away, but to no avail. The Lord’s message to Paul instead is, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” The word for perfect here in the Greek has the sense of maturity. “We mature as we recognize our weaknesses—our limits—and learn to rely ever more deeply on the power of Christ dwelling in us.”

I recall a time when my internship supervisor Larry Giese, from Harvey ND, once proclaimed this to me. It was after I taught my first confirmation lesson. I so wanted it to go well. I wanted the confirmation kids to like me as the new intern. But I bombed. I tried to do too much. My lesson was too long. I was disappointed in myself. Larry said to me the next day, "Jon, even God's grace is sufficient for you." He was right. Those words set me free.

God's grace is sufficient for us. We hear of that grace today and taste of it in communion. I always say, if God can use Paul, who started off as a persecutor and murderer of Christians, God certainly can use you and me to share Christ with others in word and deed. Paul's words to the Corinthians speak a word of hope to all of us as we navigate personal and health challenges, election year anxiety, and concern for our climate as hurricane Beryl is about to take aim at the Southern US and record heat is overtaking the West Coast.

Contentment can be found in the cross of Jesus. In weakness on the cross, Jesus was saving the world. When we experience loss and disappointments, failures, mistakes, we can boast in these things only because Christ has redeemed them. We can learn from them and find strength in our faith. God's grace is sufficient for us to start again... and again. Nothing we do or the world does to us will ever cause Jesus to turn his back on us. He is with us always to the end of the age. Romans 8 31-39 says Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus Our Lord. Amen