

Rev. Lisa Schrott  
June 28, 2026  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Philippians 4:6-7  
*Deeper in Faith: Being in the Here and Now*

Our second reading this morning is from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. New Testament scholar Raymond Brown notes that Philippians is in some ways "the most attractive Pauline letter, reflecting more patently than any other the warm affection of the apostle for his brothers and sisters in Christ."<sup>1</sup> It is a letter of encouragement to the church as they are dealing with some challenges. Paul encourages them to be unified in the Spirit as a way to address the internal dissension. There also appears to be some external opposition to the church, with complaints about "strange teachings" because the Christians do not acknowledge the local gods. Our text this morning comes from the ending of the letter – the final appeal and encouragement to the church. Just before our text, we hear this notable refrain: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." Hear now Paul's words to church in Philippi and God's word to us:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**The word of God to the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

It was a status conscious place, a place where the powerful retired after serving the empire. A place where people who spent their lives jockeying to be the top dog continued the competition to win the race. It was a place where social hierarchies mattered, and who you dined with and how you dressed was the talk of the town. It was a place where everyone knew whose name was ascribed on the buildings; everywhere you looked there was a plaque bearing the name of "an important person." You know that kind of place. That was Philippi. In her commentary about this book, the Rev. Cynthia Jarvis quotes historian Joseph Hellerman saying, "If Roman society in general had become the most status-symbol conscious culture of the ancient world,... no region east of Rome was more quintessentially Roman in this regard than the colony of Philippi."<sup>2</sup>

Sound familiar? It was a place where "doing" was more important than "being," a place where activity and achievement was prized, where idly whiling away the hours meant you were somehow not living up to the tasks at hand. Sounds a bit like our world today. And Paul says: "Rejoice in the Lord always.... Do not be anxious about anything... the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds." Sounds so easy, doesn't it?

---

<sup>1</sup> Raymond E. Brown., *An Introduction to the New Testament*; Doubleday, 1996, p484

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia A. Jarvis. Proper 21 Commentary 1: Connecting the Reading with Scripture. *Connections. A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*. Westminster John Knox. 2020. p343-344

Rejoice in the Lord always. Do not be anxious. God's peace will be with you. When I hear these phrases, I imagine Paul sitting on a balcony overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, having a cup of tea after watching a glorious sunrise; the sun taking the edge off the cool morning, the palm fronds rustling in a gentle breeze, with plenty of time and space and energy to reflect on his ministry and his commitment to Christ. To be deep in prayer for the church, lifting up their cares and concerns. To be in the here and now, not dwelling on the past or worrying about what comes next.

It turns out that this image of Paul is far from reality. Paul actually writes this letter from prison. Scholars are not sure which stay in prison this was (Paul had a few), but the community in Philippi have been praying for Paul's release and they send a member of the community, Epaphroditus, with gifts to supply Paul's needs. Epaphroditus delivers the gifts, but gets very sick - almost dying. When he recovers, Paul sends him back home to Philippi with this letter, a letter where Paul expresses that despite his circumstances, his heart is filled with much joy because the church in Philippi is thriving and that Paul remains in partnership with them.

Joy is a central theme throughout this letter, repeated 16 times in the short four chapters. When I was in seminary preparing to take the Bible Content Exam, one of the five standard ordination exams Presbyterian pastors must pass, we learned that if the question asked about joy - survey says - Philippians is the correct answer.

What strikes me as I read Philippians is how Paul is able to focus on the big picture matters of importance rather than complaining about those things that are pulling him down. To find a way to experience joy and peace even when you are anxious and the world is pulling you down. Paul encourages us not to bury our emotions, not to pretend they don't exist, not to deny them, rather to take them to God. He says "let your requests be made known to God." The Message version of the Bible rephrases the passage this way: "Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."<sup>3</sup>

This is the heart of our spiritual practice for Week 2 of Deepening our Faith – experiencing God's presence by sitting in the here and now. Reflecting on where God has been present in your life and where you have not been able to sense God's presence. And as importantly, reflecting on how this makes you feel – what your emotional state is, being honest about fears and anxieties. This is hard work. It is hard work for everyone – pastors included.

Part of ministry training is something called CPE – clinical pastoral education. It is often done in a hospital setting – so you will hear pastors talk about their hospital chaplaincy rotations. But CPE is more than pastoral visits. It also forces you to look at what you bring to ministry –

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%204&version=MSG>

your strengths, your tender spots, your family history, your successes, your failures, the places that cause you deep discomfort that are hard to admit. In CPE you spend a lot of time talking about your feelings. A lot of time. We had a feelings wheel in our conference room that we were forever being asked to refer to. And you learn a lot in CPE – at least I did. Some of it is practical – like how to respond when a hospital patient doesn't want to visit or pray with you – because they are angry at God or think God is irrelevant or because you are a woman.

And some of what you learn is also deeply personal and deeply humbling. Things you never really realized about yourself or the way you come off to others or the way you internalize the world around you. One of things I learned about myself is that I was uncomfortable being uncomfortable. I am one of those people who believes we all have something in common with each other and through conversation, humor and food, we can find that common thread. As I've moved around the country, traveled around the world, taught students from cultures so vastly different than my own – I rarely, if ever, have met someone I couldn't find some kind of connection with. I love hearing peoples stories and the places our lives have intersected.

My CPE experience at the Veteran's Administration hospital in Atlanta affirmed that. Until one day when it didn't. I was struggling with connecting to a veteran who was dealing with some significant emotional and psychological issues. I was sharing with my supervisor my frustration. And he asked me why it was so important for me to find a connecting point. And I said –without even thinking of the implications of my words - because it makes it more comfortable. And in the CPE probing way – he asked me why being comfortable was important. And I'm thinking – what – who wants to be uncomfortable? And then he challenged me to be uncomfortable and awkward. To not try and get to the easy rapport place right away. To be ok with discomfort. I leaned into that challenge during my chaplaincy internship. I continue to lean into it today as a pastor – not always perfectly. It is hard.

The Rev. Dr. Becca Erlich shares in her notes about the spiritual practice of being in the here and now that “we do not grow while we are in our comfort zone; we grow when we are the "just right" amount of uncomfortable. Staying with what is comfortable means we do not challenge ourselves, and challenging ourselves too much means that we can get overwhelmed and revert back to comfort. We want to find that "just right" place where we are in the present moment and slightly challenged.”<sup>4</sup>

To sit in discomfort. To sit in joy. For everything there is a season a time for every matter under heaven as we heard Barbara share from the poetic words from Ecclesiastes. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to keep silent and a time to speak.

---

<sup>4</sup> Becca Ehrlich, Deeper In Faith Week Sermon Notes. Omaha Presbyterian Seminary Foundation; 2026.

Rev. Dr. Erlich notes that “That first step can be difficult and scary-- what is it going to be like to actually experience emotions like anger, lament, grief, disgust, shame, guilt? Only when we are present with these emotions can we process them and move forward in life. What will it be like to be fully present and listen for God? Only when we are aware of God's presence can we hear what God is saying. ... Stepping out of our comfort zone and being in the present, whatever the present moment is, will continue to help us grow in our relationship with God and with ourselves and others.”<sup>5</sup>

I do want to highlight a caveat...Sitting in the presence of God is not the same the same thing as being stuck in a negative spiral or doomscrolling through social media. I receive a weekly email devotion from the Lutheran pastor the Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber. For those of you who know Bolz-Weber’s writing and speaking know that she is too put it mildly, blunt and provocative. And wickedly funny. If you haven’t read her, I encourage you to check her out, with the disclaimer that the language is definitely on the adult end of the spectrum.

I really appreciate Rev. Bolz-Weber’s recognition of the tough situations life sometimes gives us. This week her devotional featured a flow chart of what to do when one feels anxious and fearful. It opens with the question: Did you just read something on the internet? If you answer “Yes” it prompts you to the next question: Was it fed to you by an algorithm built to keep you in a loop of fear and outrage so that you keep scrolling and some [one] then makes ad revenue? Another flow chart loop begins with the question: Did you just talk with someone who just read something online? In the flow chart she has some great suggestions of what to do if you find yourself in a loop of anxiety or fear, including: Play with your dog. Eat some food made out of food. Drink some water. Call your mom. Find somewhere to volunteer. Listen to some music. Breathe. Move. Make some toast. <sup>6</sup>

I’ll add to the list to spend time in the presence of God. Our spiritual practice for the week is designed to do just that. “The Daily Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us. The Examen is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us see God’s hand at work in our whole experience. It is adapted from a technique described by Ignatius Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises.”<sup>7</sup> We will walk through it a little later in the service. It is a wonderful way to live out the words Paul share in his letter to the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Join me in prayer.

---

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> <https://thecorners.substack.com/p/as-requested-my-flow-chart-when-i>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>