

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Philippians 4:4–13**

**Sermon: “Rejoice in the Lord”**

Today’s Propers highlight the great messianic banquet. The Lord graciously calls us, against the sad backdrop of sin’s prideful rejection of the Lord’s salvation, to rejoice in the extravagant, undeserved invitation to feast at his table. *“My soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation”* (Introit, Isaiah 61:10)—garments fit for a wedding feast. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”* (Psalm 23:5). Isaiah (Old Testament Reading) envisions the great messianic feast that the Lord (and he alone) will provide for all nations on Mount Zion. Jesus (Gospel) tells the parable of the marriage feast. Some pridefully spurn the invitation; others are joyously surprised to be included.

The Epistle shares this theme, if not its language. God’s people are to *“rejoice in the Lord”* (Philippians 4:4). Anxieties, however real their cause, cannot destroy our salvation in Christ.

Giving those anxieties to the Lord in prayer (4:6), we learn with Paul ***“in whatever situation [we are] to be content”*** (4:11) as we feast on the realities of the faith, given and established in Christ. Paul calls for joy, amazing since he writes from prison. His suffering for the Gospel could not destroy his joy, since it was grounded on the bedrock of Christ and the peace of God we have in him.

Our text is from the conclusion of Paul’s letter and follows one of its few “negatives,” as Paul entreats Euodia and Syntyche to ***“agree in the Lord”*** (4:2), a situation Paul may have in mind in our text as he exhorts his hearers to ***“let your reasonableness be known to everyone”*** (4:5).

Too easily and too often, God’s peace in Christ becomes a slogan on our lips, not the joy of our hearts. That’s a problem that afflicted the Church in Philippi too. Anxiety, need, persecution, anger over grievances—such problems seek to invade and destroy the peace sinners have been given in Christ.

Today, the Master of the Feast (Matthew 22:1–14) sends a servant named Paul into the highways and byways of our lives, to invite us to his peace feast.

The feast is ready, the banquet hall prepared, and the Master determined to fill it with guests. God's forgiving love in Christ calls us to food and fellowship in his peace feast, where we find shelter from life's storms, refuge from peace's enemies, and rejoice in that rich food and fellowship the Lord of the feast provides.

***“Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, Rejoice!”*** This is the Master's urgent invitation, Come to the feast! And what a startling invitation it is. Snatched from off the streets, muddied and bloodied from life's battles, we are dirty, tired, and grumpy—hardly “guest list” material. But the Master warmly invites us, dirty clothes and all. He dies for our sins, washes us clean in Baptism, and wraps us in the festive robe of righteousness that qualifies us for the feast.

With such a generous Master, we can ***“let [our] reasonableness be known to everyone”*** (v 5a). No need to hold on to grievances or assert our rights. ***“The Lord is at hand”*** (v 5b). He sees our sufferings; he is present in Word and Sacrament to dress our wounds; and soon he will return and restore to us a hundredfold.

Therefore, we need *“not be anxious about anything”* (v 6a). Hard to believe for little faith, even harder to practice. But that’s no surprise when we try to “go it alone.” We are not alone! “The Lord is at hand,” and he invites us, *“in everything by prayer and supplication” always tempered “with thanksgiving, [to] let [our] requests be made known to God”* (v 6b). He will provide. *“And [so] the peace of God,” peace restored by Jesus’ death, “which surpasses all understanding,”—even our worry—will stand guard over “[our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus”* (v 7).

Within his banquet hall, our enemies and life’s storms shut out, clothed in Christ’s righteousness, it’s time to be nourished and strengthened. If for your body “you are what you eat,” this is no less true for your soul. So why, instead of feasting on God’s promises, do we stuff ourselves with spiritual junk food, flattering platitudes, and the latest shipment of self-esteem? Like cotton candy, they’re sweet to the taste, but without nourishment.

Here in the Master's banquet hall, this won't be a problem. The soul's appetite is whet by the wafting aromas of grace: ***“whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise”*** (v 8a), these things tantalize us with their goodness, a goodness that flows from the one who is the truth. ***“Think about these things”*** (v 8b). Ponder them. Smell their wholesome aroma; for they are promises of good things to come. You are dining as the guest of the King. “Think about these things.”

But don't stop there. ***“Take! Eat! Drink of it, all of you!” “Delight yourselves in rich food”*** (Isaiah 55:2). Who is satisfied to smell the feast but not partake? So, Paul exhorts these Philippians: ***“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you”*** (v 9). This is not the pointed finger of the Law wagging at you. It is the hand of grace, beckoning you: “Come to the feast.” The Master's Word and Sacrament will nourish your famished soul.

But that's not all! Yes, the heart of the feast is the rich abundant food, but a feast is no feast without the fellowship. Again, we are not disappointed. The Master has called us into the fellowship of his feast. In love, he binds us to one another and, even better, to himself.

Paul gives us here a small, bright window into the love-bond God created between Paul and these Philippians. Already, ***“in a severe test of affliction”*** (2 Corinthians 8:2), they had warmly and generously ***“given according to their means . . . and beyond their means . . . in the relief of the saints”*** (2 Corinthians 8:3–4). Now again, even in their own great need, they had sent Paul a sacrificial gift. As if he were enclosing a snapshot of his beaming face when he first opened their gift, Paul writes: ***“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me”*** (v 10a). Not that their concern had ever died, as Paul quickly points out: ***“You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity”*** (v 10b). Times were tough! They could justifiably let their own needs preclude any gift to Paul, but their mutual bond of love in Christ was too strong, and Paul's heart bursts with affection for their love that came wrapped in the sacrificial gift!

They shared in his suffering for the Gospel, and how it lifted his often-heavy heart!

God's love binds us together in Christ. I walk life's road as a pilgrim, but I am so grateful to God that I do not walk it alone. God put you here for me and me for you. He put us (together) for others. It is the fellowship of the feast. Yes, we are weary, muddied and bloodied by the journey and its trials. We long to be safe in the banquet hall. Our hearts hunger for the feast. But we walk and ache and hunger together, each one of us invited by God's forgiving grace in the cross of Christ, a fellowship of pilgrims.

Most of all, we rejoice together in our fellowship with Christ. Paul drew strength from that fellowship constantly, and it carried him above the anxieties of earthly life—anxieties he had experienced often and severely, as we hear from these words: ***“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me”*** (vs 11b–13).

Too easily and too often, we find ourselves far outside the banquet hall, consumed by anxiety, irritated by grievances, disqualified from the feast by our sin. Take heart, fellow pilgrim. God's forgiving love in Christ calls you anew into the fellowship of the feast; and to you I say, by the Master's command: In the name of Christ Jesus, your sins are forgiven. Come to the feast!

Amen