

# Listening for the Promise

## WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23) – October 15, 2023

*“For 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.”*

*–Philippians 4:11b–13–*

*“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13).* This has become one of the most well-known verses in Scripture. We see it on bumper stickers, coffee mugs, t-shirts, and more. It’s almost become a sort of motivational mantra for many, but its original meaning (as penned by St. Paul) is so much deeper.

At the time that Paul was writing this letter to Philippians, he was imprisoned. Paul was locked up for proclaiming the Gospel: that Jesus Christ suffered, died, and was buried, and on the third day, he rose from the grave for the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation for all people. So as Paul was sitting in a prison cell, he wrote about being content. Contentment is something we all struggle with. It seems that we’re always wanting more. It’s a lesson that’s hard for adults to learn; it’s hard for kids when the world around them constantly says they won’t truly be happy unless they have the latest video game, iPhone, or toy. We adults fall into the same temptation. So how can we be content with what we have? How can the homeless family living in an encampment under a bridge be content? Paul knew what it was like to have an abundance; he also knew what it was like to be in need. And yet, he was content. Paul was imprisoned for simply preaching the Good News, and yet, he was content.

The key is in verse 13: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* No matter what situation we may find ourselves in, we must not forget that we are not alone. Christ is with us, just as he promised to his disciples, *“I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matt. 28:20). It is Christ who gives us strength to take on whatever life hands us. When life is good and things feel in order, it may be easier to be content. However, we all know that life isn’t perfect. We’re certainly going to face trials of varying degrees. But Paul urges that even in the midst of some of the greatest trials we might face this side of heaven, we can still be content. We have every reason to be content because of all that God has provided us with through his son Jesus Christ.