

Satisfied with Enough
Preacher: Rev. Karen E. Gale
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15:25

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Philippians 4:12-20

A few years ago my wife and I sat down with a financial planner. We knew we didn't know a lot about money and so we wanted someone with experience to explain our choices and help us make decisions about saving and retirement and future planning and the like.

Well, we happened to sit down with a financial planner who did not first ask us about our money. He asked us what our goals were. We told him we wanted to travel and to start a small farm. And he asked us, "ok, so you reach those goals, then what." And we answered with less certainty some idea about growing old and being able to help people. And he asked, "then what?" And so on and so on until we truly got to the end--the final end of what we wanted.

After a long, long moment, and with some tears, I said that I wanted to die and hear from God "well done, good and faithful servant." That's what I wanted, what was most important to me. That is what would make me fully satisfied. That is how I would know what enough was.

This was not what I expected when I sat down for financial planning. I expected some mumbo jumbo about mutual funds and load costs and risk assessment.

I did not expect was to look deep into my understanding of what being a human being faithfully caring for my resources meant. And trying to put it into words. And how much my faith was the center of how I understood that.

Now, eventually we did get down to what to do with the money we have saved and what we might want to do moving forward. But I will never think about my financial future, our financial future, the same way again. I now know that at the end of the day, at the end of my life, what it means for me to be fully satisfied. And it has very little to do with how much money I end up putting into an account and much more about how I use what I have to help other people.

In our scripture reading this morning, we continue with Paul's letter to the Philippians. Remember this is a wealthy Roman town in northern Greece. We can assume that many in the congregation at Philippi have resources at their disposal. We know they have been fighting amongst themselves and face adversity from the outside as well.

Paul is grateful to this community for supporting him while there and not once, but twice, while he was in Thessalonica. He expresses his gratitude and thanks them for their gifts, not just because they helped him, but because they themselves, the members at Philippi, will benefit from their generosity.

Now we can think Paul is talking about some giant tabulation that God has going in the sky--a giant Excel spreadsheet with what we give and how much glory that gets us in the ever after. In fact there is a pretty bad joke about it--want to hear it? Of course you do!.....

A man died and went to heaven. He was met at the Pearly Gates by St. Peter who welcomed him in and led him down the golden streets. They walked past mansion after beautiful mansion. The man couldn't wait to see what palatial home was in store for him. They finally came to the end of the street where they stopped in front of a dilapidated shack. The man, in shock, asked

St. Peter why he was to live in this rundown shack when there were so many mansions others lived in. St. Peter looked at him earnestly and said, "we did the best we could with the money you sent us."

Ah, good old guilt. But you know, I don't think that is what Paul is talking about.

Paul is talking to the congregation in Philippi about how giving changes us. How we are changed when we help others. And how much of a blessing it can be to give. The old adage it is better to give than to receive rings true for Paul and he is trying to convey this to the congregation. It's not about the how much, it is about the process.

But it is not just giving that Paul is talking about. This is not just a stewardship message for the folks at Philippi. He is also talking about what it means to be satisfied...to be satisfied with enough. That was a message that was just as relevant for an ancient audience as it is today.

Paul says, "I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need." In all things, Paul looks to Jesus, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

For Paul it is not money that satisfies, or having a lot to eat or having a home. Paul gave up all of that when he was called into ministry rather abruptly. Paul was wealthy at one time. He was extremely well educated. He was a leader and had a position of political and religious power. He had status. And he had all the material things that go along with that: good food, a nice home, folks to help out around the house.

But that is not what satisfied him.

We know in our conscious, thinking brain that having more money does not make people happier. We know this. We see this in the celebrity trainwrecks. We see this with most lottery winners.

This is ancient knowledge. The book of Ecclesiastes from the Old Testament, a collection of wisdom sayings, reads: "The lover of money never has enough money; the lover of luxury never has enough income. This too is pointless."

We know this is true.

And yet...

Just a little bit more. Just a few grand more. Just one raise more. One slightly bigger house. A big splash vacation each year.

But what Paul promises instead is that "my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

God will fully satisfy every need of yours. You will be satisfied. Or rather your needs will be satisfied.

We know separating needs and wants is tough work. It's tough for every 5 year old and perhaps even tougher for the 45 or 55 or 65 year old.

Paul tells us God will fully satisfy every need. Satisfy our needs.

Besides being a good stewardship text, I think this is a good text to mull over in the interim time. Yes, most churches have their pledges drop during the interim period whether there has been conflict or not. Change brings uncertainty and in uncertainty people can hang on to their money.

But viewing this text not just about financial stewardship but about the stewardship of the church as a whole is even more helpful.

How are we good stewards of what we have? Not what we want. Not of the church of our imagination or the church of our memory but of the church, the congregation, the faith community we have right now.

How do we trust God to meet our needs, the needs of Pilgrim?

Because our needs are different than our wants or even our dreams.

On the one hand we may long for how things were and want what we used to have. We want that. But looking at the data about churches at this time in history we will not again be the church of the 1950's and 60's with people crammed into the pews. Social norms about going to church are different now.

Pilgrim will not be again the church that hosts a huge antique fair for dealers around the area-- those dealers no longer exist as the antique business moved online. We will most likely not host a huge youth group on sacred Sunday afternoons because Sunday afternoons are now full of soccer, hockey, orchestra, art classes, homework, language school and more. We don't own Sundays like the church once did.

We don't have a God who fills what we want. But we do have a God who gives us what we need. And with that we can be satisfied.

Paul was satisfied not because of the money the church sent via Epaphroditus. He was satisfied because he had ministry that needed doing, he was stuck in prison, and these gifts would facilitate the ministry he was trying to achieve. To reach people, and serve these small churches, and help them grow in a healthy way.

The gifts helped make that happen. They were enough and Paul was satisfied.

Here at Pilgrim we have enough. You are enough. This faith community is enough. We can serve God and serve one another and be satisfied. And in that satisfaction comes a peace of mind and an understanding of ourselves as a place where God can do great things. Not later. Not when we have more people. Not when the money situation changes. Not when things look like they did before or we wish they would in the future. But now.

Marc Crosby is a pastor from Texas who shares this story.

"I used to play second base on a little league baseball team. I was the third string second basemen (obviously, I didn't play baseball very well). I didn't play in the games very much, as you can probably imagine. But I did play a lot in practice. And in practice my coach said, "Cosby, even if the ball is not coming your way, get in position and act like it is." "Even if the ball is not coming down the second base line, expect it to come your way."

He continues, "Church, the best way to prepare for a blessing is to get in position. Get in position for God to bless you. Stop feeling so down and get in position. Stop walking around

with your head down and get in position. Stop worrying about what has not happened and get in position.” (From the sermon Good News in Bad Times. Delivered August 2007, in Houston, Texas, by Marc Cosby.)

We need to get into position. To learn healthy, community building ways to be together and get ready for what God is doing in this place. For The fear that we don't have enough is really the fear that we are not enough. But Paul tells us, “we can do all things through the one who strengthens us.”

If we are satisfied that we are enough, we will begin to open up more. We can reach out not as a church body desperate for other bodies to come fill our pews but with hospitality and ready to share the hope that we find here and that others can find too.

We can engage in mission work locally together as people of faith who respond to Jesus' call to reach out to neighbors in need. To help build the Habitat house, or serve at the homeless meal, or stand at the vigil or advocate for justice.

You are enough. And God will provide for Pilgrim's needs. And we can be satisfied.

You know there is a hymn about that I want to play for you...

“You can't always get what you want.

“You can't always get what you want.

“You can't always get what you want.

“But if you try sometime, you just might find, you get what you need....”

(Rolling Stones, You Can't Always Get What You Want)

Amen!