

## *The Strength of Gentleness*

### **Philippians 4: 1- 13 (October 15, 2017)**

#### ***Philippians 4: 4-7***

4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

#### ***Historical Context***

It may seem paradoxical that the letter of Saint Paul that speaks most about joy was written in prison, at a moment when the apostle does not even know whether he will be freed or whether he will undergo martyrdom. But precisely in this difficult and complicated situation he discovers the secret of Christian joy and shares it with us.

#### ***Theme: The Strength of Gentleness***

Gentleness is seen as an antidote to fear or worry. It is paralleled with prayer as a process of transformation and renewal. Where worry and fear tend to freeze us into repetition of behavior or erratic response flailing around for some escape, gentleness offers an active and intentional way to see ourselves and the world around us in a larger context; allowing us time and space to moderate our fear.

For Paul, gentleness has nothing to do with weakness. In fact, he would claim that only the strong can afford to be gentle. So, living gently means to always be living into the strength of Christ as it's revealed in the most unlikely places. As Paul affirmed, "The Lord is near." Show your gentleness in your life and conduct and in your daily interactions. Be patient under injury, provocation, or annoyance. Be forgiving. Show your gentleness as Christ showed his: in your speech, in the returning of love for hate, of kindness for unkindness, of love for rudeness.

#### ***Gospel Story as a Case Study (Matthew 22:1-14)***

This parable draws on the symbol of the Wedding Feast. As is customary, those invited to the wedding are those closest to families of those getting married. As is not so customary, those who were invited thought that they had better things to do - working on the farm or going about their business. Some were so incensed about being disturbed that they attacked those bringing the invitations.

But, the feast will go ahead - so now, he offers his invitation to the crowds in the streets - an open invitation to anyone who wants to come.

The invitation into the Kingdom is open to everyone. We accept the invitation - but also need to make ourselves ready to attend the feast. We do this by putting on our "wedding garment" - in St Paul's words, we put on Christ - we clothe ourselves in love - in gentleness - in all that is worthy of the Kingdom.