# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Content in Every Circumstance”**

**Philippians 4:10-14**

**October 11, 2020**

My favorite cartoon characters are Calvin and Hobbes. Calvin is a young boy who carries on conversations with his stuffed toy tiger, Hobbes, who comes to life in the cartoon. In the strip I’m thinking of, Calvin and Hobbes are walking through a quiet field on a beautiful summer day when Calvin asks Hobbes: “If you could have anything in the whole wide world, what would it be?” Hobbes responds, “A field in which to lie down in the sun and take a nap.” “Good grief,” Calvin replies, “Is that all? Me, I would wish for a million dollars so I could buy whatever I wanted.” Then, in the final scene of the strip, with Hobbes lying peacefully asleep in the field, Calvin says: “It’s hard to argue with someone who looks so content.”

How do we find true contentment? It seems to be something that each and every one of us would like to experience, but most can’t seem to find it. We look for contentment in many different places. If I could get to this point in my career, then I’d be content. If I just had this much money, then I’d be content. If I had a bigger house, a nicer car, could fit in that size dress or pair of jeans, then I’d be content. It’s not that we don’t achieve any of the goals we set or acquire any of the goods that we seek. Rather, when we do get these things, they fail to make us content in the way we had hoped.

Today, we are concluding our study of Philippians, and in our passage Paul makes the claim that he has found the secret to being content in any and every circumstance. It’s a secret that I would like to discover and, I suspect, that you would like to discover as well. I invite you to join me in Philippians 4:10-14

How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

It seems that Paul was running low on material resources while in prison. When the Philippians heard about this, out of concern for Paul and his welfare, they sent Epaproditus with a gift. Here, Paul expresses gratitude for this gift, but he wants to make it clear that his contentment was unwavering throughout the whole process. Before he received their gift, he was content. Having received their gift, he was content. In whatever situation he found himself, he was content.

This is not normal, right? This is not how most of us experience life. How does Paul do it? What is this secret of which he speaks? Before getting to Paul’s answer, let’s quickly eliminate a couple of possibilities. First, Paul is not content because he has lowered his expectations and decided that contentment is unimportant. He doesn’t approach difficulties by trying to convince himself that he just doesn’t care, that it really doesn’t matter, that he never really wanted what he currently does not have.

Second, Paul is not content because he has somehow figured out how to convince himself that he is content. He is not relying on his own strength to look around his jail cell and say to himself, “I’m fine with my situation. I’m fine with the threat of a death sentence. I’m fine with not being able to travel and share the gospel.” Let’s be clear! Paul does not say that he is content *with* every circumstance; he is content *in* every circumstance.

So, let’s get to his secret which he reveals in verse 13: in Christ, he receives the strength to be content. He has learned how to be content in every circumstance because he has experienced Christ in every one of those circumstance. The Christian life, for Paul and hopefully for each one of us, is lived out in relationship with Christ. It’s not just knowing about Christ or trying to be a good person like Christ was, but it is allowing the living Christ to live in us and through us, and to daily give us every benefit, every blessing, that comes with being in that relationship. And, Paul says, one of those benefits that Christ gives him in every circumstance is contentment.

Paul’s statement about contentment is a continuation of something he said just a few verses earlier when he encouraged the Philippian believers not to worry or be anxious about their circumstances. Instead, Paul said, they were to pray about them. They were to access the power of Christ in their lives through prayer, through regularly bringing their anxiety producing situations to Christ, and the peace of Christ would be in their hearts and minds. It is through prayer that we experience Christ’s peace about a circumstance, and it is through prayer that he gives us the strength to be content in all things.