

## **Christmastide**

January 3, 2016

“The Words of St. Paul for Such a Windy Place”

Philippians 4:4-23

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### **Introduction**

Now more than ever, it seems as though our daily lives are swept with the shifting currents of many winds. We find ourselves challenged by the pace of life, the need to balance family and work, and figuring out how to navigate an increasingly smaller and complex world where social media constantly alerts us to competing social, political, and religious agendas. It's in such a windy place as this that we take solace in the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, bringing to us some much needed reassurance and sanity.

### **Background**

Paul first came to the city of Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia, in response to a vision of a Macedonian asking for help. There at the riverside, Paul brought the gospel to Lydia, a seller of purple fabric, and she and her household were baptized (Acts 16:9-15). With that, the church at Philippi was born. Philippi was a city of disparate influences and practices, including the worship of Greek, Roman, and Egyptian gods, along with emperor worship. Such factors, along with many others, created a rather windy place for the followers of Jesus in Philippi, and it is to them that Paul, from a prison cell, dictated a letter that rings as true to our present circumstances as it did to theirs.

### **Pray**

Gracious God, guide us now as we look into your word together that we might grow in our ability to live with assurance, regardless of whether our circumstances are characterized by abundance or need. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Read**

Philippians 4:4-23

### **Discuss**

As you answer the following questions, you may find it helpful to observe that Paul offers instruction to the Philippians on three fronts: how they pray (v. 6), how they think (v. 8), and what they do (v. 9).

1. The way the world typically works, we ask for something, receive it, and then offer thanks. In 4:6, Paul turns that order on its head: ask, give thanks, and then receive. What frame of mind is required to genuinely be thankful ahead of an outcome, and how can we cultivate such a mindset?

2. Paul was intimately acquainted with circumstances of advantage and disadvantage—even severe suffering. It's natural to put our emphasis on correcting our circumstances, but Paul suggests in 4:7 that the real battleground lies elsewhere, in our hearts and minds. What kind of prayer helps bring about peace, and why?
  
3. In 4:8, Paul lists a number of things that we ought to dwell on. How does doing so help us to maintain our sanity in the midst of a chaotic world? What would it look like to practice Paul's exhortation with something that's currently going on in your life right now?
  
4. In 4:9, Paul encourages the Philippians to keep on doing what they have learned, received, seen, and heard in him. How does this kind of action and intentionality help us live with assurance in a windy place? What would need to change in your life to be able to utter these same words to another?
  
5. Paul states that he has learned the secret of being content and maintaining his sanity no matter what his circumstances are. What is his secret, and how does it result in his experiencing God's peace?
  
6. It isn't as though Paul faces everything that comes his way with a smile on his face; he admits that he experiences distress (4:14). What does it look like to move from a place of distress to one of peace?

### **Apply**

Choose something related either to prayer, your thought life, or your actions that you can do with greater trust and reliance on God. For instance, how might you inject thanksgiving into your prayers? What lovely or excellent thing might you dwell on daily, and how might that draw you nearer to God? What simple, Christ-like action might you emulate daily to more closely align yourself with the mind and will of Christ?

### **Pray**

Dear God, we thank you that we can do all things through you, who gives us strength. Help us to take your yoke upon ourselves and learn from you, that we might trust you with our lives. By the grace of your Holy Spirit, help us to grow in assurance and contentment, regardless of how windy our world may be. Amen.