

Swim, Float, Pray
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
Philippians 4: 4-9



4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!
5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I'm a big fan of water. How about you? Sipping, dipping, diving, cannonballing, splishing and splashing; ocean, pool, bathtub, sprinkler, it's all good to me!

On one of our adventures to the beach, a friend asked Martha how long I would stay in the water? She replied, "all day or until he prunes." True story. I tell you all of this because in today's letter to the church at Philippi, Paul writes about prayer the way I experience water. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

The church in Philippi had been going through a hard time. They had been experiencing persecution from within and beyond. The Romans had been after them. The folks who were strict adherents to Levitical laws were chastising them. The libertines among the Christian community were laughing at them for taking faith so seriously and making sacrifices to follow Jesus' way. Being a follower of Jesus can be challenging! Yes? We try to do the right thing, the good thing, the faithful thing, and despite our best efforts we receive messaging that we are either offending someone or not doing "it" right.

- We hear that the government has created laws that seek to force a particular belief upon us regarding the sanctity of life, as if the state can define what is sacred.
- We experience pressure from churches that despise our love of neighbor and our acceptance/fellowship with those who are deemed unacceptable by the culture.
- We feel the sting of neighbors who cannot understand why we would advocate for sharing resources with the community so as to level the playing field, when there is *so much to be gained* by gaining more stuff.

Well I want you to know that it has always been so for followers of the Way.

We live in an anxious society that is usually trying to vie for power or control of something or someone. In all that vying, the community of faith is regularly tossed about like a beach ball in the waves on a windy day, and it can become particularly tricky for us to navigate those currents when the stress comes from within our community! When we experience members

taking pot shots at one another in an attempt to gain control or spiritual superiority over one another. When we hear someone proclaim an ultimatum of belief that they suppose should apply to everyone.

Paul experienced that dilemma in the church that he loved at Philippi.

There were a few folks who were close to Paul who steered a bit away from the cooperative path of discipleship he laid out for them. We don't hear the details of what was going on, but Paul gently redirects them in this morning's lesson, to create unity among those who are serving our Lord.

He advises: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

All of these stressors can turn up the heat on our faith, in much the same way as the heat was turned up on us this past week. Yikes! It has been HOT! And we have more heat coming in the coming weeks...in other words, Summer. And Paul's call to prayer is much like our movement into the presence of a fan, or air conditioning, or a sprinkler, or a body of water. Paul wants his community to immerse themselves in prayer. He knows (perhaps from the over 400 times it is employed in our Bible's) that it is the cooling activity that can take the edge off of our souls when we are hot and bothered. He believes that by living in prayer, we can stay connected despite the pressures that are put upon us.

Quick question: How many of you enjoy swimming? Martha was a waterfront director when we met, and I watched her teach children how to swim. Blowing bubbles to get used to having their faces in the water.

Moving their arms. Kicking their feet. Seeing the pride and joy when they began to move forward under their own control. It was a wonderful thing to experience. She was patient and encouraging. She still is. Anyway, if you know how to swim, you know that it takes a bit of effort to move through the water. Whether you are doing the crawl, the side stroke, breast stroke or doggy paddle, you have to *move it move it* to get around.

I'd like to suggest that there are prayers that we pray which are a lot like swimming. We kind of know where we'd like God to take us and we pray in that direction. Moving our lips, our legs, our arms, our hands, our spirit to see a friend heal, or help a neighbor meet a need. We put a lot of energy into some prayers.

Still there are other prayers, that are a bit more passive. These are the "your will be done" kind of prayers. These are the "I'm not sure what to do or say" kind of prayers. I call these "bobbers" or "floaters" because like in swimming, we allow these prayers to carry us in the direction that God wants to carry us. We become vulnerable in our posture: either a fetal position with our heads briefly under water, or an open arms attention to the sky. Like with Brownian motion, we submit to buoyancy and atomic movement, currents and the wind, to lift us toward a shore where we can find rest. We accept the direction and give thanks for God's hand in carrying us to something unexpected.

Both kinds of prayers are useful and faithful and good as they call us to think about and experience our relationship with God and one another. Both kinds of prayers make us aware of others around us and the movement that they are making with God.

Both kinds of prayers put us in contact with the source of our lives. Whether we are swimming or floating, we are immersed in the sea of God's love. Whether we are in water or on land we are immersed in the presence of God's love...so we can do the whole *swim or bob* thing here just as easily. Really. Think about it like our spiritual ancestors thought about it, we are moving through a God saturated world.

There is nowhere we can go where God is not present.

There is no way we can move without passing through God space.

There is no circumstance we can encounter where God is not there.

Whether we're swimming or floating, we are in God's care...and no matter how hard the winds blow, no matter how anxious the scene gets, that doesn't change.

God is the medium we move through.

Stand up. Move. Swim. Sit. Float.

As we move into another week of heat and humidity, if buffeting winds and waves, remember that you are moving through God: blowing bubbles, moving your arms, your legs, your soul, or gently allowing yourself to be carried. Remember *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* ⁹ *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

Keep cool. Amen.