

Practicing Peace

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[0 : 0 0] so again i say good morning to you we're so glad that you could join us we have a lot going on a lot going on and so we are doing all that we can to try to be together even though we can't physically be together and we're thankful for this technology but as i said last week i never thought we'd be using it quite like this but so thankful to have it um i i've been spending a little bit of time online lately and i saw a video not too long ago of two boats and they were two boats that were identical same make model everything and they were both uh side by side in the water and the water was really choppy and windy but the fascinating thing about the video is two identical boats the one uh the one on the left was rocking and tilting and shifting and every every wave that hit it made it look like it might tip over and the same boat right next to it identical on the outside remained perfectly calm and the waves were crashing into it the chop was crashing into it but the boat remained completely steady and the reason is that these boats were identical on the outside but one of the boats had an internal stabilizer there was a gyroscope in the boat that was whirring away and as long as that gyroscope was in motion the boat remained steady no matter how choppy the water gets and the water got and uh and it's really the same with people you know when life gets choppy and crazy when there's a lot of uncertainty there are some people that are completely undone by that they they lose perspective they give way to panic um other people who might look the same and act the same on the outside are somehow able to remain calm and even keel no matter how choppy the water gets and this is more relevant than ever right now in the midst of this global pandemic the water is as choppy as it's ever been there are people all around the world who are sick and dying in greater and greater numbers um this thing is it seems to be spreading at an exponential rate some of you are isolated and are facing the prospect of a long period of isolation others of you are trying to manage and care for and love your young kids and uh and trying to do some work from home some of you are facing uncertainty in your job maybe you're worried about losing your job maybe you're not making an income because you're paid hourly some of you are small business owners and you're facing the prospect of closing up shop and all of these things are are dreadful they bring all kinds of challenges with them and when you look around there's really no corner of life that has not been impacted by this and so in order to get through this we need an internal stabilizer we need that that process whirring away inside to keep us steady no matter how choppy the water gets and so that's going to be our focus for the next few weeks here at advent live stream worship we're going to be looking at various passages of scripture that help us understand what it takes to become the kind of people who are able to remain calm and steady and even keel no matter how much uncertainty we face and how choppy the water gets we're going to start by looking at this very well-known passage in philippians it's a letter that paul wrote we're going to be focusing on chapter 4 verses 4 through 9 and i wanted to start here because paul is uniquely qualified to speak to us in our current moment many of us right now may feel that we are under house arrest we we don't feel like we can leave our homes we feel shut in and as paul wrote these words he was literally under house arrest most likely in rome and he was awaiting a trial and facing the possibility of an execution so even though he was facing those circumstances he was able to write this letter to the philippians and it's amazing

letter and there's so much wisdom in here for how to how to remain calm and even joyful despite the circumstances that we face and here's what he says in in verse 9 of chapter 4 he says what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the god of peace will be with you so paul because of all that he faced had to learn how to practice peace he had to learn how to develop these internal processes so that he could remain even keel and he's commending these practices to us he's saying do as you have seen me do and the god of peace will be with you and so we're going to look at three of these practices that paul commends to us in this passage and we're going to see that all of them are necessary each one is necessary to to give us that kind of stabilization the first practice that paul commends comes in verse 4 he says this rejoice in the lord always again i say rejoice he's emphasizing let your reasonableness be known to everyone in other words he's saying no matter what your circumstances no matter what you face choose joy and the biggest revelation of this verse is that joy is a choice we can choose to rejoice and you may you may ask how's that possible you know is this some kind of like pollyanna pie in the sky uh optimism that that denies reality and that's not at all the case that the reason that it's possible no matter what we face to always choose joy is that joy is not rooted in us nor is joy rooted in our circumstances but joy is rooted in who god is it's rooted in god's character it's rooted in a god who is unchanging it's rooted in the fact that god is always there no matter where you are this morning no matter how alone you might feel god is there with you it's rooted in the fact that god's love is always being poured into your life even if you feel unloved even if you feel that no one is thinking about you or no one cares about you god is looking at you right now and he's loving you he's delighting in you and it's rooted in the fact that god's purposes are always unfolding and if your life is anything like mine it rarely makes sense and yet god's purposes are always unfolding and so practicing joy means choosing to turn our attention to god and to celebrate these truths to celebrate who he is to revel in him no matter what we're facing you know i was watching the hobbit the other day with my boys because coronavirus and i was struck by the part where bilbo and the dwarves are in mirkwood forest and they've been in there for some time and in the book it says that they are completely lost and it says that they've been in the in the forest so long that they are sick for a sight of the sun and of the sky and uh they're starting to fight amongst one another and argue and blame one another and the book says that in reality they're much closer to their goal than they realize the they're much closer to the edge of the forest and the end of the darkness than they realize and yet they have no idea because all they can see is the darkness right in front of them and then it says that bilbo decides to climb up one of the trees until he can stick his head above the canopy and he's able to do that and he sticks his head above the leaves and finally he's able to turn his face toward the sun and he feels the warmth of the sun on his face he feels the breeze blowing against his

skin he sees all of these butterflies fluttering around the tops of the trees and he's able to see where they are and he takes a deep breath and then he goes back down to tell the dwarves and that's essentially what it means to practice joy that's what it means to choose to rejoice paul's saying if you want inner stability it starts by choosing joy that doesn't mean ignoring the darkness it doesn't mean being naively optimistic or idealistic it means choosing not to dwell in the darkness choosing to look beyond it paul's saying rise above the darkness he's saying turn your face toward the son of god he's saying take a moment to feel the breeze on your skin and know that the spirit of god is with you he's saying remember that the darkness one day will end and the ending of the darkness is probably far closer than it feels but one day it will end and we will go on that's what it means to choose joy and if you do this it's not only going to change how you feel it's going to change how you relate to other people that's why it makes sense for paul to go on and say let your reasonableness be known to everyone because if we're regularly choosing joy and we are dwelling on who god is and his love for us and his grace for us then that will naturally overflow into our relationships with other people we will be gentle and kind and gracious and forbearing and all of the things that that word means so the first practice of peace the first way to get that internal stabilizer going is to regularly choose joy get your head above the trees and turn your face to the son of god now somebody hearing this might object and they might say you know this sounds great but there are real problems in life and we can't always be sticking our head above the trees and looking at the sun at some point we've got to go back down into the darkness and we've got to deal with the problems in the world and that leads to the second practice that paul commends to us which is the practice of thankful prayer thankful prayer he says in verse 5 the lord is at hand the lord is here with us do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to god and the peace of god which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in christ jesus so he's saying just like we are able to choose joy rather than dwelling in darkness he says we are also able to choose to hand things over to god in prayer rather than dwelling in anxiety because the core of anxiety is our desire to control things and paul says you have a choice you don't have to clutch those things with a white knuckle grip believing it all hinges on you you have an opportunity to hand them over at any time day or night hand them over to god in prayer and then he says something pretty amazing he says no matter what whenever we pray whatever we're asking for whatever the circumstances that we are bringing to to the lord he says we should always express our gratitude to god and i want to make it clear he's saying we should thank god in advance before we even know the outcome of our prayers we're saying god thank you for whatever you do in response to these prayers and this kind of prayer thanking god in advance thankful prayer no matter what the outcome that's only possible if we trust god if we trust his character if we trust that even if it doesn't seem like it he is for us he's for you elizabeth elliot lost her husband uh when he was killed on the mission field and in one of her books

she writes about british shepherds and she says that british shepherds will often take sheep one by one and regularly they have to throw sheep into this huge vat filled with antiseptic liquid and the shepherd has to force each sheep completely under the surface of the liquid eyes ears nose they have to go completely under and it's terrifying to the sheep and they make all kinds of sounds that that that let you know that they're terrified they they struggle and fight and the and the and it looks cruel but it's also necessary because if the shepherds don't do this then the sheep will become infected with parasites and disease and the suffering will be far worse down the road and so uh it's ultimately for their good even though it doesn't seem like it and elliot says this as she reflects on the grief that she's endured in her life she says i've had some experiences in my life which have made me feel very sympathetic to those poor sheep i couldn't figure out any reason for the treatment i was getting from the shepherd i trusted and he didn't give me a hint of explanation as i watched the struggling sheep i thought if only there were some way to explain but such knowledge is too wonderful for them it is high they cannot attain it you know trusting god doesn't mean believing that bad things won't happen hopefully we're not that naive trusting god means trusting that whatever does happen god can use it for our good whatever does happen somehow it will become a part of the good work that god is accomplishing in the world now i don't pretend to understand how that is but then again i'm not god but i think that should give us hope for this whole pandemic as awful as this has been as much suffering as it has caused and will cause i'm going to be honest i am praying that god uses this pandemic i'm praying that god uses it not only am i praying that he ends it but i'm praying that he uses it that that that somehow our society is fundamentally altered as a result of it i'm praying that it changes our lives i'm praying that it changes the world i'm praying that it wakes us up i'm praying that it takes a society that is divided into shrill special interest groups and and politically obsessed and i'm i'm praying that somehow it lifts us above that that somehow it gives us perspective that we didn't have before that it changes our interactions with one another that that when we are able to come back together again in society in public spaces that we that we look at one another and even if we've never met we say i missed you i missed these small insignificant grocery store interactions i missed being able to say hello to you on the street and maybe we'll do a little more of that that's what i'm praying for and and you say well how do we know that god can do this and i would say the best example of this in history is the cross simultaneously the greatest act of evil ever committed and yet god wielded that to bring about the greatest good imaginable because it made possible the redemption of the world and me and you if you put your faith in him and if god can wield suffering like that to bring about that kind of good surely he can wield whatever suffering we're experiencing to bring about good as well and and and and what we see is that when we pray like this thankful prayer trusting god and thanking him in advance for whatever outcome he brings when we pray like this it says the peace that passes understanding will guard our hearts and minds now i just want to i want to make it clear the peace that passes understanding is the peace that comes when we let go of our need to understand that's why it's the peace that passes understanding it's me saying to god i don't need to understand this i don't need to control it i'm going to let it go because i believe that god has things firmly in hand and we know in our hearts

that god is god and we're not so these are the first two practices joyful joyfulness choosing joyfulness and in thankful prayer thanking god in advance no matter what the outcome and in the third practice that paul commends practice of peace this may be a bit of an odd phrase good mental hygiene which we could also say good spiritual hygiene um we've heard a lot lately about having good hygiene we've learned about the importance of washing our hands and and washing them thoroughly we've learned about the importance of coughing into our elbows when we cough and we're around other people we've learned about the importance of social distancing and and avoiding interactions as much as possible um if you go into any restaurants or go anywhere in public people are constantly wiping things down to try to uh disinfect as much as possible these are all good practices of hygiene but there's also something to be said for mental hygiene it's as important if not more important and if we're going to make it through this we need to have good mental and spiritual hygiene as well i keep this on my desk i love it somebody gave it to me um it's a it's a soap that that claims to not only uh kill our germs on contact but it also kills sin on contact which is really great wash away your sins soak uh so that's one way to do it but probably a better way to do it would be to think about uh the things that we're exposing ourselves to um this is what paul's describing in verse 8 um he says in verse 8 whatever's true whatever's honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever's lovely whatever's commendable if there's any excellence if there's anything worthy of praise think about which means dwell on these things um the things that you dwell on this is the principle the things that you dwell on are going to determine how you feel and how you act so if you're feeling right now if you're feeling anxious if you're feeling depressed if you're feeling hopeless it is probably because you are dwelling on things that are leading to those feelings the other night laura and i were kind of antsy we couldn't sleep we knew it was late we should probably go to sleep we said maybe we should watch something we said let's turn on the news it was a horrible idea it was a horrible idea um these kinds of decisions are not good mental and spiritual hygiene and and right now with the pandemic in full swing it's very tempting and honestly very justifiable to stay glued to the news um to stay glued to the headlines to to to to be constantly tracking with the latest developments and to a certain extent that of course is justifiable and makes sense but too much of that can really do damage it can begin to wreck you mentally and emotionally and spiritually and maybe you're not even aware that it's doing as much damage as it's doing and then beyond the news and beyond tracking these things uh as i said a moment ago as much as we are thankful for social media and these platforms that allow us to do this um we have to understand that almost all websites and social media platforms and apps almost everything in that world is funded by advertising now that has major implications because the way the business model works is the more they can grab your attention and hold your attention the more money they make and so there's some of the best and brightest people in the world spending full-time hours researching how to grab your attention and how to hold your attention as long as possible and it turns out negative emotions feelings like envy or resentment or outrage these are most effective at grabbing and holding your attention uh this comes from tristan harris at the center for humane technology who's put out some really good stuff on all of this but uh in other words there's an entire industry out there

[20 : 07] aimed at making you feel bad because if they make you feel bad they can grab your attention and they can hold it for longer which means they can make more money and we need to understand this when we're engaging on these platforms as much as we appreciate being able to live stream our worship we also need to make sure we disconnect and decommmodify ourselves and dwell on things that are good and true and beautiful maybe very bad for business but it's very good for the soul so read cook journal if you don't journal start journaling listen to music play music exercise take up painting get outside as much as you possibly can when you use the internet making make sure you're you're using it as much as possible for live in-person connections with other people and of course join us whenever we do live events at church of the advent our team is working hard to develop more opportunities to do that over the coming weeks the point i want to make is this don't just focus on your physical hygiene focus on your mental and hygiene just as much we're going to need that if we're going to make it through this so to kind of pull all this together this is the point that i want you to take away this morning and kids if you're if you're still with me if you're listening talk with your parents about this kids and parents as a family it uh talk about this if you're if you have roommates in the house housemates talk with each other about how you're going to encourage one another to cultivate these habits this is the point the peace of god is not some kind of supernatural sedative that's not how it works the peace of god is not like a like a holy spirit anxiolytic where we ask for peace and god kind of fills our hearts with happy feelings peace is something that has to be practiced it's a it's a habit of the heart um the boat that we talked about at the beginning remains steady as long as those processes are whirring away inside as long as there's motion and in the same way we remain steady as long as these practices remain in motion inside us choosing joy thankfully praying to god and thanking him in advance no matter what the outcome might be and then practicing good mental and spiritual hygiene practice these things paul says and the god of peace will be with you let's pray lord we thank you for your word and uh lord we know that um even as these are things that we need to practice that um we also need your holy spirit that we need you to take our practices which will always be incomplete and we need your spirit to enliven them and bring life uh to the darkest most hopeless parts of our heart lord um we pray ultimately that you would fill us with your presence this morning i pray that you would uh enable us to get our heads above the trees to turn our eyes toward the son of god and to behold him in his full glory lord and that would fill us with hope so that we can face the darkness ahead together we pray this in your son's holy name amen