

# Pie Sunday

Coram Deo

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gracia

Sermon Preached at

Stouffville United Church on

Sunday March 12 2023 by

the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles

## “Standing Firm” Philippians 4:1-9

I've never been one that liked cake. -except for cheese cake- I love cheese cake. And pies. Any type of pie-except pumpkin pie. So returning to the ResF military after serving a decade in the RegF military and starting again to serve in parish ministry -only to find out that church's now have a Sunday dedicated to serving pie. Well, I was hooked.

When I left - churches had dinners but you had to wait through a Turkey or roast beef dinner in order to get to having the pie. I was always in favour of have the dessert first.

When I mentioned this to a colleague in the military she said it's not a Sunday about actual pie. It's about the math number called Pie. 3.14.

As you know from a few weeks ago I don't do math. But she said. The 3 is for the month of March and 14 for the day. But today is March 12th not 14. So you can see I still don't do math. Yet, she said, you celebrate pie on that day. But do we still get to eat pie? I'd even accept shepherd's pie. Shepherds— me—She wasn't sure.

Then a UCC minister explained the pie is about being Public intentional and explicit in our welcoming of all people to our community churches but especially those within the LGBT community.

Now, I have always been one who ministered to anyone who came through the doors of my office in the military or the church. That was never an issue for me, the issue for me was - do we still get pie?

It was all a bit confusing for me, but I'm assured we do get pie.

Don't you wish that life was simpler? Well, it isn't. However, it can be made simpler. What the mother and the boy did not realize unto nearly too late, was that there was another option. What we often don't realize is that we don't have to wait and have our lives shatter because of what we perceive to be the only option. Often, if we take the time, we will begin to see other options.

Paul was facing death. He was in the midst of what seemed to be an insurmountable problem. He didn't despair or give way to anxiety. He did what he was instructing those in Philippi to do.

Too often today when faced with what seems to an overwhelming problem many people give way to anxiety. “Anxiety,” says Christian Psychologist Minirth and Meier, “can be traced to three sources. It can be rooted in a lack of self worth, which is the basis

of most psychological problems. Second, its source can be a lack of intimacy with others, which includes friends, husbands and wives, family members, and people on the job. Thirdly, it can be traced to a lack of intimacy with God.”

It is interesting, that after saying this, we see the three sources of anxiety in this morning Scripture passages, and the answers to dealing with them.

As we come to the close of our study of Philippians on this PIE Sunday. It is important to note St Paul made a point of mentioning two Women at the beginning of chapter 4 who had been working closely with him. He was making it perfectly clear that old views and ways of dealing with marginalized people, or people who were viewed as “less than” - was not acceptable. And then points out what we are to focus on. He said, “Finally, my brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, -if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things...”

There was not condemnation of people who don't fit what is considered normative. Rather, he was calling us all to focus on things that are supportive.

## I

"Stand fast in the Lord... Those things that you have heard learned... – **believe.**

Paul knew quite well that it is one thing to have learned the truth and another to receive it. The facts in our head are not enough, they also move from our head to our heart. They must be made to be apart of our lives.

There is a Nebraska Monk who wrote about living life, had he had it to live over again. And when I find myself, as I have become overwhelmed with doing rather than being, I have tried to sit down and reflect on these words.

"If I had my life to live over again, I'd try to make more mistakes next time.

I would relax, I would limber up, I would be sillier than I have been this trip.

I know of very few things I would take seriously.

I would take more trips. I would be crazier.

I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets.

I would do more walking and looking.

I would eat more ice cream and fewer beans.

I would have more actual troubles, and fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I'm one of those people who lives life prophylactically and sensibly hour after hour day after day. Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had to do it over again I'd have more of them.

In fact, I'd try to have nothing else, just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead each day. I've been one of those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, aspirin and a parachute. If I had to do it over again I would go places, do things, and travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over I would start barefooted earlier in the spring and stay that way late in the fall

I would play hooky more.

I would ride the merry-go-rounds.

I'd pick more daisies."

Paul was able to live with less anxiety and find joy right where he was, because he focused on having the right living. He held on to the truth. He received to the inner most part of his soul.

"Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your request known to God and the peace of which surpasses all understandings shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

## II

Paul was able to live with less anxiety finding joy right where he was and he explains it by saying "Stand fast in the Lord...Now that you have heard, learned..."—believe. And secondly, what you have "...seen and received – **heed**."

Worry forces us to focus on the wrong things. Paul knew this. This was the reason why he made it a point to say that we should think a specific way. He said, "whatever is true, what ever is honest and just, what ever is pure, lovely and excellent and whatever is worthy of praise, think about these things."

How we think in linked to how we feel. If we only think about negative things, we should not be surprised if we begin to feel that way.

Again we are reminded that if we

"Sow a thought, we reap an action.  
Sow an action, we reap a habit,  
Sow a habit, we reap a character.  
Sow a character, we reap a destiny."

It all begins with our thoughts, and what we are doing about them and with them. So Paul says, think about whatever is true.

Dr. Walter Cavert reported a survey on worry that indicated that only 8 percent of the things people worried about were legitimate. The other 92 percent were either imaginary, never happen, or involved matters over which the people had no control anyway.

There was a man by the name of Arthur Rank--he was a British industrialist. He had much that he could worry about. But he did not. It was because of what he called his "Wednesday Worry Club". Daily some worry or anxiety would arise. So, instead of worrying about it, he would write it down on a piece of paper and place it in a box to be worried about on Wednesday at 4:00pm. At that time, he would open the box and begin to read the papers he had placed in the box. And invariably, he would find that by the time he read the piece of paper almost all the worries had been handled or were no longer important. In fact, he said, "I would find that 92 percent of my worries had failed to materialize." You might ask what he did about the other 8 percent. He said this, "I just put them back in the box to be worried about next Wednesday."

Don't let fears fill your mind; but rather, fill your mind with whatever is true, honest, pure, lovely, and excellent; and allow that to force the fear out.

Our life is determined not so much by what life brings to us, as much as what attitude we bring to life; not so much by what happens to us, as much as how we look at what happens.

"So whatever is true, whatever is just, what ever is honorable, what ever is pure, lovely and excellent.... think about these things."

### III

Paul was able to live with less anxiety, and surmount the insurmountable because of the truth - "Stand fast in the Lord...Now that you have heard, learned..."— believe. And "...seen and received" – heed. And finally, **do**. He turned his fears into faith. He put his trust in God. He acted on what he could and prayed about what he could not do anything about. He had the right feelings about his situation, because he practiced the right praying. He said, "But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

There are four things he did here. He prayed about the *details, the difficulties, the desires, and the delights of his life*. He says, "...in everything by prayer". That is where we begin to get our feelings right. We begin by focusing on faith. And we do this by bringing the *details* of our lives before God. He was saying, don't worry about anything rather pray about everything.

This was the case with Paul, while in prison, and facing death; he placed his fears in the hands of God by faith. He knew who he was, and Whose he was – that made all the difference in surmounting the insurmountable.

It was 2016, and I was approach by a military member who was experiencing suicidal thoughts and another who had been harassed due to being in the LGBT community while in the Military. As a military Chaplain and minister in the United Church, it was and continues to be my responsibility to care for all....

Story of how and why I started the Pride network in Borden that spread across Canada....

When it came out that I had started the Pride Network and that now it was being started- based on a template I created -on other bases and wings, I began to be harassed, ostracized and undermined by chaplains of other denominations and my chaplain chain of command. Despite receiving from the military more command coins for excellence and service, and commendations than any other chaplain on the base. And as one Colonel admitted, likely more than any other chaplain has; it was made clear to me in a phone conversation by my chaplain chain of command, that I was never going to be promoted due to my actions of reporting harassment and supporting the LGBT community.

Change doesn't come easily. Yet, change comes as we stand fast, believe, heed and do what St Paul encourages us to do what is right.

"Finally, my brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, -if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things..."

Nelson Mandela understood this. He said

Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate,  
but that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant,  
gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us.  
It is not just in some; it is in everyone.

And, as we let our own light shine, we consciously give  
other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others.