

Executive commission 2013

Moderator's Closing Address

Reading Philippians 4:1 – 13

My brothers and sisters whom I love and long for, you are a joy and my crown. This is how you should stand firm in the Lord dear friends:

I plead with the MCG I plead with the UPNF to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes and I ask you, loyal Mshumpela to help these associations which have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel along with Clement and the rest of the fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but everything by prayer and petition and thanksgiving to send your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me indeed you have been concerned but had no opportunity to show it. I'm not saying this because I am in need because I learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hunger, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who strengthens me. Amen

When I read this in preparation for the Assembly, one question kept plaguing me over and over with regards to this chapter and it is, can a person be content and still plead or beg for something at the same time? Can you be content and yet be in a pleading mode? Twice in the passage Paul uses the phrase I have learned to be content. But twice he pleads, plead with Euodia, I plead with Syntyche that they will be of the same mind. So here is how my thinking works. If we stick with what we learned this week, if we stick with what we have attained in our knowledge of the Lord's love to us as we have studied this letter, then I would have to say Paul has let his selfish ambition come to rest. That he has let his selfish ambitions stop. He is content. He has arrived at the place of contentment. And yet he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to also let their selfish ambitions to be set aside so that they will have the same mind in the Lord. I think our blasphemy is not so much that we swear in God's name but that we use it too presumptuously. So is he present now right here in this building. Is God with us?

Why would I then persist in disagreement with one another unless I was like James or John who in the very presence of Jesus was saying to him secretly, make me more important than the others Lord. Let me just sit a little closer to you than these others. And as we read, the others were indignant when they heard that probably because they had wished the same thing.

So what is the secret of Paul's contentment? I have learned the secret of contentment. I think it is verse 13. I can do all this. I can be content whatever the circumstances. Remember he is writing from jail! He senses the end of his own life. He's written in other places of bad eyesight, of thorns in the flesh, of opposition of other people, of bearing the weight of all the churches on him, day by day. Of being utterly depressed to the point of despairing of life. Thinking there was a death sentence passed on him by God. I've learned to be content. How? Through Jesus who gives me strength. Strength from being in the Lord: The joy of the Lord is my strength.

When we get to see Jesus one day there are only two emotions that will be the choice for us. The one

will be the joy of the Lord. I see him, I know him, I love him. Or the sheer terror that the one we had abused has now been revealed to us is as Lord of all. Every eye shall see him and how will we respond? I think with joy because we belong to him.

So Paul takes aside Timothy and wants to train him as a pastor of souls. Takes a moment to be with him. He is training him as a pastor of souls not as a manager of an organisation called "the church". He's not training him to be comfortable with an office and a motor car and a list of expectations or entitlements and this is how you introduce more people into your church. He is training him as the pastor of souls. And in his first letter he writes, chapter 6 :6 "Godliness with contentment will bring you much gain". Godliness with contentment will bring you much gain. So in my simple language godliness equals God likeness. God's likeness equals Christ likeness. He is God in the flesh. Christ likeness is having the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. Emptying oneself, kenotic, over and over and over and over again. Over again. You go first please. I'll carry your load for you. Over and over again. Emptying ourselves. That godliness with contentment brings much gain. Contentment is being happy with what you have and not looking at what you don't have. Contentment simply looks at what you have and gives thanks for that. Greed, jealousy begins when you look at what you don't have. I have learned the secret of being content. I've learnt to be content whatever the circumstances I can do all the stuff through him. There's the secret. Through Him. So that is not surprising to me. That's why in chapter 3 he says we should boast in Christ Jesus. Because he is our strength. We should boast in Christ Jesus.

When you go home and the family says to you, or your church says to you, what happened at the Executive Commission? How many of you will begin by saying that the food was lekker? Or the bus was nice or how many will begin by saying we felt the presence of Christ. Put Him first. We felt the presence of Christ. Not surprising that Paul says in chapter 3 we should serve God by the power of His Spirit. It is to Him by the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, if that's true he lives in us and gives life to our bodies. He strengthens us, says Corinthians. So we rejoice in the Lord. Always in the Lord. Everything about us as Christians comes back to putting Him first in every way. I just want to say this again. Rejoice! And this is showing the attitude of Christ Jesus. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured what was in front of Him. So this is practising the habits and presence of Jesus Christ, to put joy first. To rejoice in every possible circumstance. Why? Because the Lord is near. If He's near then I rejoice. I adopt his attitude. I know I can cope because of his presence, and I now be gentle with everyone around you. Wouldn't that be a line for every presbytery meeting. The rule of this presbytery meeting is "we will be gentle".

St. Stithians high school is a pretty fancy high school in Johannesburg. About seven years ago the guest speaker was a woman. The guest speaker addressed the matrics as they go out into this world. Her instruction to the graduates as they were starting their life was, have the courage to be gentle. The courage to say He is here. I will treat you with the same respect I would treat Jesus. The unselfish and unambitious lifestyle is a gentle lifestyle.

If I asked you to name people who come to mind as leaders in this world who were, or are unambitious, unselfish let's see what list we can produce.

And the suggestions are? Mahatma Gandhi. Mother Theresa. Nelson Mandela. Mugabe (laughter). Isn't it interesting that it is possible to immediately see the sharp difference. Brothers and sisters amongst our ministers and elders at presbytery level especially, are the Mugabes and the mother Therasas. Some arrive to eat us. Some arrive to say, however horrible this person has been, this is Jesus wearing a very troublesome disguise. And that's what Mother Teresa taught her nuns. You will see Jesus in these people in disguise but it is Him wearing a horrible disguise.

Make it your goal to please Jesus. I don't know how to teach that. But with my own life and my own two girls I cannot find a more powerful motivation in life than to say: just please Christ. He is God who loves us. Utterly forgives us and He has put His life in us at our disposal. I say to them, you can be the most

beautiful people in this world who, wherever you go Hannah and Rachel, will add value by putting Christ first.

So thank you for working so hard this week. I think we worked fantastically well, not just in the formal gatherings and being with people, I've not heard one single complaint about the food. Fantastic that that has happened. I hope you've made some new friends. I hope your Insaka groups have become prayer partners in some way. If not please continue to do something about it. I hope you go home having enjoyed learning some new things about this letter from Philippians. Whenever my two daughters came home from school, and I still say to them the minute they come home from university, what was the best today? Not what did you do today but what was the best today?

And I hope when you go back to your family and friends, or you report to presbytery, and people ask you, so how was Executive Commission, or what did you do at the Executive Commission, you will answer the question by saying, firstly let me tell you what was best.

In case you are unsure of that, I will read this to you. "Whatever is true, what is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent, or praiseworthy, think about those things". Because that is where Christ put his fingerprint on us. You are mine. Be like me. Whatever happens, live a life with the Lord, putting Him first.

Let us pray. In the silence take a moment to give thanks for something this week. It could just be the face of another person. It could be something we've decided upon. It could be something deeply private that happened in your life. Just take a moment to give thanks.

Amen