

**Called and Keeping on**  
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**Philippians 4:1-9**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

<sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

**Matthew 22:1-14**

<sup>1</sup> Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.” <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.

<sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.’

What a perplexing parable we have today. This guy is invited at the last minute to a big soiree. He doesn't have the right attire but he must have figured it was better to go in the wrong attire than to be rude in not attending. And what does he get for this? Thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a favorite phrase of Matthew's. As always, we wonder what this has to do with us. People for generations have become worried after reading “For many are called, but few are chosen.” This parable, though, is not meant to give us one more thing to worry about - will I be in or will I be out? The rest of the Bible contends that God is the giver of grace and mercy and there is nothing we can do to earn such gifts. There is no worry intended and no good to come from worry. So

we come back to what does this parable have to do with us?

**You** have been called. Even if you are still trying to figure out what God is calling you to, trying to figure out what gifts you have and how you can use them, you are called a child of God. The question out of this morning's reading in Matthew is this: do you take your calling seriously or do you just show up, taking for granted the importance and seriousness of the invite? A role of the biblical prophets was to comfort the afflicted and discomfort the comfortable. Are **you** comfortable? Have you settled into a routine, content with the quality of your faithful life?

As I was preparing for today's new member class, I returned to our Book of Order, the half of the Presbyterian constitution which gives us guidelines for the day-to-day aspects of being church. Of particular interest to me was the section on the responsibilities of membership. I won't read off the whole list, but I'd be happy to print a copy for you. The one responsibility which seemed so fitting for today is the last one: review and evaluate regularly the integrity of one's membership, and consider ways in which one's participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful. Another reminder to not get comfortable. The way we live out our faith can be similar to the way we approach a new regimen of exercise or a new way of eating or a new hobby. We begin gung-ho and, after some time and maybe some tedium, our dedication fades for whatever reasons.

If you were invited to the wedding banquet today, would you be able to show up in your finest without notice? Is it well-kept, free of holes or stains and fitting well? Is your best self on hand because you're already using it? **Or** would you have to go looking for it, wondering where you misplaced it, trying to recall when you last used it? Are there weeks when you leave it behind at church? We all have. Yesterday was not a "best self" day for me. I showed less patience than I would have liked in some frustrating situations. Suffice it to say, I actually involuntarily smacked myself in the forehead out of frustration - an action I thought was reserved for overly dramatic, scripted television shows. In a small measure of redemption, I was on the phone at the time and not standing in front of the person. I could give you a number of excuses, and some of them are even good ones, but they don't change the fact that my best self was tucked away in a closet. It happens to all of us. Forgetting our best selves is so universal that it's the very circumstance Paul is talking about in his letter to the Philippians. You see, his letters didn't just get received and filed away by the Clerk of Session. They were meant to be heard and memorized and repeated and passed along as guidance and encouragement for all the fledgling churches.

We read this passage at the Wednesday Bible study this week and someone commented about these poor women, Euodia and Syntyche. There are so few women remembered by name in the Bible, and these two? They get remembered for fighting. Too bad. Alas, their fighting has come to symbolize any

infighting that has happened in the Church. Ever. Paul loves this church at Philippi; indeed, it is believed to have been his favorite. At the time he writes, this church has been plugging away for a number of years and is big enough that there are at least two groups meeting, one led by Euodia and one led by Syntyche. For whatever reason, they are no longer on the same page, although it doesn't seem that their differences are related to theology - they're preaching the same gospel.

No, it seems like their issues are personal, and quite likely petty. Not so far off from my "excuses" for less-than-exemplary behavior yesterday. And probably not so far off from the reasons you have been short with someone or have justified dismissing the inconvenient needs of another. Maybe someone switched from one woman's house-church gathering to the other's. Maybe one borrowed the other's mortar and pestle and forgot to return it. We won't ever know and, despite curiosity, the origin of the fighting is not important to the lesson to be learned. In fact, the lack of detail allows us to insert our own drama into the story. By making it ours, we make it easier to hear Paul's words of encouragement and advice to apply to our circumstance.

So, before we hear again those words of encouragement and advice, I'm going to ask you to think of, and admit to, a personal and/or petty squabble in your own life. I'll give you a minute now. [pause] OK, do you have something in mind? Then hear these words from Paul again. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry 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. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

Another way of hearing these words comes through C.S. Lewis: "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." Part of being human means needing to re-commit ourselves to gentleness and prayer and supplication with thanksgiving; part of being human means needing to re-commit ourselves to whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable. To quote a mantra of the 70's, keep on keeping on. Review and evaluate regularly. Ask yourself, should you be invited to the wedding banquet today, could you wear your finest in a moment's notice? **You** are called. Answer your call by "keeping on" doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in Christ and through Christ, through Paul, through your parents in faith, whether they be your biological parents or the people you look up to for their faithful witness. **You** are called so keep on!

Let us pray: God of grace and mercy, we thank you for your call upon us and we ask you to send your Spirit among us that we might be better able to uphold our best selves for you and for your children.  
Amen.