

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 15, 2015
Philippians 4:7-9
Something to Think About
Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

What are your thoughts about the topic of stewardship we have looked at over the past weeks? I mean, what are do your hearts and minds tell you is right? Obviously, for our hearts and minds to tell us what is right we must know what is right. Therefore, we must continue to base our thoughts about stewardship on what God's Word teaches.

That is true, isn't it, about what we think about all things. We need to fill our hearts and minds with thinking about what is right. Right thinking leads to right practice. We talk about muscle memory in activities like golf. Paul talks about heart and mind memory for living in Christ; not only having it, but guarding it.

The Apostle gives us **Something to Think About**. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds while we think. The Word of God guides our thoughts for action.

We are all well aware of how quickly and wrongly our thoughts can turn from what pleases God to what offends his holiness. It does not take any effort to draw up sinful thoughts from the contaminated well of our hearts. Jesus said, "For out of the heart comes evil thoughts-murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." [Matt. 15:19] Sin is right there with us when we try to do what is right.

We need a guard to protect our hearts from such evil thoughts. We need something to enable us to keep our minds right while we think. It has to be something greater than ourselves. It must transcend our own understanding. We have just the thing in "the peace of God."

God gives us this peace through the gospel of Christ. It is the peace the world cannot give. This peace is our reconciliation with God by Christ's blood that forgives those sins that begin as evil thoughts in our hearts. God's peace removes our guilty consciences, and empowers our godly living. Peace is the power of the Holy Spirit in God's Word pastors proclaim in the weekly sermon. This is why most of us speak the Votum, Latin for peace, following the sermon. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

The good news of Jesus Christ stands guard over our hearts and minds while we think. Peace in Christ is like the sentry who stands guard twenty-four seven at the tomb of the unknown soldiers in Arlington cemetery. Paul adds that as we think about right things, "the God of peace will be with you." God alone is the source, the fountainhead, who makes peace flow like a mighty river into my soul.

We all have something to think about. Our minds never are empty. Our thoughts either please God, or offend his holiness. Those thoughts generally lead to actions; sinful thoughts translate into sinful action, right thoughts translate into right practice. The Word of God guides our thoughts for right action.

While the peace of God guards our hearts and minds, the Word of God guides our thought so we can "put it into practice." The word conveys continuity and repetition of action. When my heart and mind are concentrated on right things, then I can put those things into regular action pleasing to God in my Christian life. All habitual actions are not wrong, only sinful habits.

St. Paul lists the things we are to “think about.” “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.”

Think about also conveys the idea of continued, on-going action.

Something to think about for the Christian is not how to satisfy the desires of the sinful nature. We think about the truth God reveals. We think about things that inspire our spirits and work a deep sense of awe in us before God. Our thoughts dwell on what is right and morally pure rather than on sin. We think about morally beautiful and admirable qualities like Christian charity and humility. If it is excellent in God’s eyes and I can praise it, I keep my mind on such things.

God’s Word guides in the things that qualify in these areas. They are things that agree with God’s will and flow from faith. They are things that benefit my neighbor and please God. They are things that excuse my conscience rather than accuse it when I do them.

The Philippians had seen and heard many of these qualities in Paul when he had been among them. He had been an example. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put it into practice.” Paul had been an example in his preaching. He wanted them to think right and act right so he knew and proclaimed only God’s Word among them. He did not tell them what he thought they should think about and put into practice. Paul told them what God says for them to adopt as a practical habit in their lives.

So it is with us. Pastors preach what God says and strive to model it as an example. God’s Word teaches us what is right about stewardship, about sharing the gospel, about using our vocational abilities in the Lord’s service. The Word of God guides our thoughts for right action.

Maybe someone has said to us, “What were you thinking?” They said that because of some action they saw us do. It is my prayer and my purpose for preaching the law and the gospel that when people see Bethlehem congregation and ask, “What were they thinking?” that they can answer their own question with, “They were thinking what is true, and noble, and right, and pure, and praiseworthy, and are putting it into practice.” Amen. <SDG>