

‘Stronger’: Why Christians Can Handle Hard Times

This sermon series was delivered by the Rev. John Hardie at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in the fall of 2011. The texts for the sermons were taken from the assigned readings from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Sermon Summary #4: “The Invincibility of the Prayerful”

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.

The Freedom to Choose Your Attitude

Viktor Frankl spent years in a Nazi concentration camp. In His book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes amazing coping powers certain people had to retain their inner freedom and dignity. He wrote, “We... can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last pieces of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way.”

The attitude of Prayerfulness

Writing to the Philippians from prison, St. Paul similarly denies circumstances the power to breed despair. Instead, he exhorts his fellow believers to rejoice in the good that has come to them.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say “Rejoice.” There's always some reason in our little world for sadness, but there's also reason for rejoicing. How in our minds do those reasons compare? God's love, salvation, Christ's death for us and resurrection versus the sin and uncertainty of the world. How do they compare? So why aren't you rejoicing?? Get with it!

Hand in hand with rejoicing is the Christian's privilege of praying.

Do not worry about anything. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. The day we opened our heart to God is an eternal day. Prayerfulness is the grace to consciously and deliberately hold our hearts open to the One who already knows the thoughts of our hearts.

The Christian answer to the world around us is first prayerfulness –to bring our hearts and minds before God, and to make them about God, by offering them to God. In reality God is far bigger than our problems. We must let Him be bigger in our minds, as well.

Remember:

- 1) There is nothing that can happen to you that has not happened to millions of others.
- 2) As a human being you run the risk of bad things happening.
- 3) There are people who became stronger - even great - facing what you now face.
- 4) Say, “I don’t know how I’m going to handle this, but I know that with help from above, I can handle this.”

Prayerfulness is not magic. No bedtime or morning ritual is going to make everything okay. When we speak of prayer, we are talking about the serious business of bringing our lives before God. We examine our dependence upon God. We place our lives in God’s hand to be used. We rejoice in what God has already done. We confess our needs and dedicate our talents, committing ourselves and all that we are to make our common cause *God’s kingdom*, not our kingdom.

Aligned with God in this manner, *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* With your hearts and minds thus guarded, there is simply nothing that can or will separate you from His love. Nothing can or will destroy your soul which is precious to God, or make your life any less valuable to Him than it was the day that He died for your salvation. You are His. Period. Forever. Exclamation point. And that is the fourth reason from Philippians why Christians are stronger; why we can handle tough times.