

# Praiseworthy Living

October 12 • 2008

## Focus Scripture

**Philippians 4:1–9**

Additional Scriptures

Exodus 32:1–14

Psalms 106:1–6, 19–23

Matthew 22:1–14

**God of all wisdom, lead us to embrace your will and your ways as we learn to live in community with your people. Forgive us when we miss the mark and fail to be ambassadors of your compassion. Restore us to the joy of life in your presence. Amen.**

As the people of Israel journeyed in the wilderness while being formed as God's covenant people, so do we journey while learning to live as a community of disciples. Writing from prison, Paul encourages disciples to be open to God's leading, rejoicing in new patterns of praiseworthy living that reflect the joy of life in communion with God.

## Focus Scripture: **Philippians 4:1–9**

Philippi was the leading city of Macedonia, which is northeastern Greece in our time. About 42 BCE it was conquered by the Roman Empire and set up as a Roman colony. Many former Roman soldiers settled there, and the culture in Philippi was a blend of older Greek culture and newer Roman culture.

Paul uses the Greek word *ekklêsia* – which translates “called out” – to describe the early Christian church. Paul understood the church to be an alternative society in the midst of the Roman Empire. Philippi was an “outpost” of the Roman Empire; the *ekklêsia* was an “outpost” of God's reign. Paul proclaims that Christian identity is defined by God and not by earthly rulers.

One aspect of living in a Roman colony like Philippi was that if enemies threatened, people could expect the emperor to “save” them. The emperor was often hailed as “saviour.” Paul tells the Christians in Philippi that their (our!) saviour comes not from Rome, but from God's realm: Jesus Christ.

The focus passage begins with the call to “stand firm” in faith, ready to celebrate in Christ privately and publicly. (Keep in mind that almost all worship in the Roman world was public.) Paul says that the ability to live in this faith will be “guarded” by God's *peace*, in contrast to the peace offered by the Roman Empire, *Pax Romana*. Further, the faithful should not focus on the terrible things that happen, but on what is true, honourable, and just. Living a praiseworthy life in a world rife with hostility is not easy. The antidote to such cynicism is to pray, rejoice, and focus on all that is truly good in God's realm.

Paul's appeal to Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind suggests disagreement in the Philippian church. Paul seeks support for these loyal co-workers.

Note how fully Paul includes these women as equal partners in the “work of the gospel.”

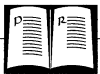
For many modern readers, Paul's call to “rejoice in the Lord always” may be a challenging one. Some will have heard Philippians 4:4 as prohibition against feeling and expressing the wide range of human emotions. Some may have felt that their struggles were minimized by others quoting this verse. Modern disciples are called to search for ways to describe the kind of spiritual joy to which Paul is referring.

A different kind of “rejoicing” is reported in the story of the golden calf in **Exodus 32:1–14**! God has provided food, water, and a covenant way of life, yet the people grumble. Losing trust in God and in Moses, the people of Israel turn to Aaron to fashion “gods” for them. God is angry, and it is all Moses can do to convince God to relent by appealing to God's reputation among the Egyptians. The psalmist, in **Psalms 106:1–6, 19–23**, rejoices that God loves and forgives even when God's people are not faithful.

A striking contrast with the rejoicing in Philippians is found in the anger and violence at a wedding in Jesus' parable in **Matthew 22:1–14**. This story of a celebration gone wrong is shocking to the reader. Through it, Jesus offers a paradoxical word about the need to be ready to rejoice always.

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We are invited to reflect on what it means to be formed as a community of God's people, committed to living out the ways of God. In Christ, we can live with joyous confidence in God's presence as we continue to learn and grow. What is the role of prayer in such a life? How is God inviting us, this very moment, to embrace praiseworthy living?



Replacement biblical background page for **Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican** congregations using the **paired reading** stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

